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WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

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WORDSWORTH AND HIS CIRCLE

BY

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WITH TWENTY ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

THIS book does not aim at being a biography of Wordsworth, though it is strung on a biographical thread; and, as the title indicates, it is in many places as much about Wordsworth's contemporaries as about himself.

As my method is deliberately desultory, I have tried, with whatever success, to be on my guard against repetition, the attendant shadow of desultoriness. The first chapter, being introductory, contains a kind of forecast, or summary in advance, of the chief contents of the chapters that follow.

It is impossible to be even initiated into Wordsworth without knowing, and knowing well, a great deal of his poetry. I have, therefore, not stinted myself in quotation and comment, though I have tried to avoid the reproduction of verses which might conceivably be regarded as trite or insignificant. In the Appendix will be found references for those quotations the whereabouts of which is not clearly shown in the text.

The prefixed list of authorities may serve the double purpose of showing the sources from which I have drawn, and guiding the reader who may wish to go more deeply into the subject.

D. W. R.

WINCHESTER, 1907

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WORDSWORTH AND HIS CIRCLE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

WORDSWORTH IN HIS CIRCLE

IN one sense it seems a dubious use of metaphor to regard Wordsworth as the centre of any circle. For, if we think of a body of men as a circle, we must think of the centre as one of a group who shares its qualities; one who gives and takes, who lives in intellectual community and not alone. Yet no fact about Wordsworth is more certain and more striking than his essential solitariness. To him, even more than to Milton, his own words belong: *his soul was like a star and dwelt apart.* The Puritanism of his age, the culture of his age, are much more perceptible in Milton, than are any sympathies of the eighteenth or nineteenth century in the work of Wordsworth. Milton, for all his mighty originality, was a *classicist;* he was proud to work on traditional lines; his form was as great as his matter, and is inseparable from it. But Wordsworth had the daring, defiant individuality of the true Romantic. He thought of himself, and he thought rightly, as a reformer, an innovator, in poetry; and he neither had, nor believed himself to have, much essential kinship with any of his contemporaries. He always had enthusiastic admirers, and always friends whose cordial admiration fell short of enthusiasm; but there was not one of them, who was wholly without perplexity and

disappointment about the master, not one who could wholly abandon the attitude of apology.

While disciples and admirers were not without uncertainty and occasional dissent, Wordsworth himself habitually felt a serene self-complacency which enclosed him as a constant envelope, but which must not be confounded with any kind of vulgar egotism. Traces of such egotism there undoubtedly were in Wordsworth; but they have really nothing to do with that consciousness of mission and certainty of ultimate success which gave to this poet the prophet's high self-regard and solitary outlook.

Wordsworth wrote to Lady Beaumont in 1807 that he was "easy-hearted" with respect to his poems. "Trouble not yourself," he wrote, "upon their present reception; of what moment is that compared with what I trust in their destiny? —to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office." Such self-criticism is nearly as impersonal as the words which immediately precede it—

"It is an awful truth, that there neither is nor can be, any genuine enjoyment of poetry among nineteen out of twenty of those persons who live, or wish to live, in the broad light of the world—among those who either are, or are striving to make themselves, people of consideration in society. This is a truth, and an awful one, because to be incapable of a feeling of poetry, in my sense of the word, is to be without love of human nature and reverence for God."

One who thus thinks of poetry and of his own effort in its service, must feel and speak as if alone in a wilderness; and perhaps no British man of letters was ever in this sense so unrelated, so original, as Wordsworth. His detachment is only made more obvious by the recognition of his debt to forerunners, and of his disciples' debt to him. In two very important respects, the way was prepared for Wordsworth, not in Britain only, but in Europe: men's affections were turning from purely human interests to interests in which landscape had a large share; and from the attractions of elaborate civilization to those of extreme simplicity. No two men ever moved further

apart than Rousseau and Wordsworth; yet their common ground and the identity of some of their presuppositions are notorious. Nor, among his British contemporaries, is it only Wordsworth who reminds us of Rousseau. Goldsmith and Cowper, not less than the ballad-restorers or such a Romantic mediævalist as Chatterton, felt, each in his own way, that disapproval of things as they were, that discontent with civilized man, which Rousseau indulged with such startling results. Goldsmith expressed them with a somewhat conventional pensiveness; in Cowper they were made to subserve the Evangelicalism of the age; but the burden, in both, was a praise of rusticity and simplicity, an appreciation of man as man, without any lendings or trappings, which are not far from Rousseau's central thought. And if Rousseau's thought became revolutionary, it must be remembered that Wordsworth's sympathies, in some of his strongest hours, were on the side of the Revolution. He hailed the great French upheaval as a resuscitation of man; and the passion of his maturity, his hatred of Napoleon, was passion for the freedom which the tyrant had overthrown. So he read the events.

But none of this makes Wordsworth's originality less complete. The Nature to which he preached and led a return, had a very different complexion from the Nature of Rousseau's worship; and in the rare atmosphere of its high places we may be sure that Goldsmith and Cowper would have found it hard to breathe. Even in his earliest work, in the *Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* (in the latter of which, indeed, Coleridge saw "the emergence of an original poetic genius above the horizon," but which are only remotely Wordsworthian), we find a treatment of landscape very different from Cowper's. Cowper's feeling for landscape leaves little to be desired in genuineness; but his method of description has nothing of the intimacy of Wordsworth's. And when, in and after *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth became Wordsworthian, he thought and spoke of Nature, whether as revealed in man, or in that world of the open air in which man lives and moves, as no one, either in or out of Britain, had thought and spoken of it before. Some of his predecessors had observed Nature with affectionate care and truly and beautifully rendered her details; many had personified her; but it was left for Wordsworth to realize

her as a living unity, and to love her as the saints love God.

Nor is Wordsworth's isolation less striking if we think of the history of his influence. Immediately and remotely, by repulsion as well as by attraction, his influence has been immense; but it has never been of the kind which leads to imitation. Wordsworth founded no school. His words ran over the length and breadth of the land; his thought has sunk deep into one generation after another; but hardly any one has borrowed his accents or attempted to complete his message. Nor can it be said of him, as it can be said of, *e.g.* Byron, Scott, or Tennyson, that he was the spokesman of an age, that he ministered to prevalent taste, that he made articulate the thoughts and feelings which were striving for expression in younger as well as lesser men. What in this sense we call *popularity* could never be affirmed of Wordsworth. He sang of "things common" indeed; but there are many ways of "touching" such things, and Wordsworth's way was not the world's.

To find Wordsworth's circle, then, we must think partly of his many contemporary literary and artistic friends and admirers, cordial always, but always critical; partly of that opulent cluster of Romantic poets with their attendant and like-minded critics, among whom Wordsworth, in spite of his singularity, must be ranked. In the latter sense, the circle must be held to include Burns and Blake, Shelley and Keats, as much as Coleridge and Southey, De Quincey and Charles Lamb.

About the great literary outburst which marked the close of the eighteenth, and the first quarter of the nineteenth century, so much has been said that, probably, the less one now says the better. All that one may hope, or need attempt, to do, is to rehearse some generally recognized conclusions and point out some special aspects and distinctions. If we ignore these we shall miss Wordsworth's place in literary history.

The Romantic Revival, as it is the fashion to call the outburst, was a unity in diversity. It was a unity, as the springtime is a unity, inasmuch as it brought new life into the world, the world of verse and prose, of feeling and thought. It was a unity inasmuch as it depended upon novelty; as it worked on men's minds by way of surprise, excitement, sense of change. It was a unity inasmuch as it came to be associated, often

loosely and rhetorically, with the French Revolution, as if it were a kind of literary and artistic counterpart of that great social and political movement. But its diversity is more apparent than its unity. Even if we could bring ourselves to believe that one impulse, or a small number of kindred impulses, produced the Romantic Revival, we should have to acknowledge that the Revival included a great many very different things, of which the interconnection is by no means obvious. It has been called—not without good reason—the "Renascence of Wonder." It has been called, with equally good reason, the restoration of English poetry to Nature, or of Nature to English poetry. It was certainly the revival of various and beautiful lyrical measures; it was a new birth of lyrical passion; it was the revival of delight in love; it was the recovery of power to recognize and render the beautiful. It was a reaction against a long monopoly in poetry of the satire of society. It included, as we have seen, a recovered sense of the beauty and significance of landscape; and with this must be conjoined a recovered sense of the attractiveness of animals, and of their claim on human interest and affection. It was an assertion of the rights of individuality in genius against the obligation of literary tradition. It was the discovery of light in the "Dark Ages," in that mediæval world which had seemed the mere ruin and negation of classical culture. Last, but not least, in the Romantic Revival poetry became essentially and truly "metaphysical." It asserted its kinship with theology and philosophy; it assumed prophetic garments and mystical accents; it became the interpreter of symbols, the revealer of realities beyond the phantasmagoria of the senses.

One feature was, on the whole, common to the many aspects of the movement, and the recognition of it will bring us back to Wordsworth. Romance is the cult of the extraordinary, the unusual; its presupposition is that in the world of art a refuge is to be found from the tyranny of what is common, under which daily experience groans. Very different were the presuppositions of the poetry and fiction dominant in Britain for more than a hundred years before the Romantic Revival can be said to have begun. The poetry of Dryden and Pope assumed the all-sufficiency as poetic themes of contemporary society, manners, and politics. The so-called "comedy of

manners," which culminated in Congreve, found its subject-matter and inspiration in the same quarters. The English novel renounced all connection with the preposterous romance of the seventeenth century, and nourished its mighty youth on the most homely, sometimes the most sordid, realities of British life. The poetry which intervened between Pope on the one hand, and Coleridge and Wordsworth on the other, was a poetry of transition, which foreshadowed the future as well as recalled the past. But in the prose romance of awe and supernatural terror which Horace Walpole handed on to Mrs. Radcliffe, and in the old-world opulence of Chatterton and Ossian and the ballad-restorers, literature turned its face resolutely from the temporary and the ordinary towards the extraordinary and the remote. And this conversion was of the very essence of the Romanticism which glowed like a bright star on the opening of the nineteenth century.

"But what," the reader may ask, "has it got to do with Wordsworth?" Was not Wordsworth's battle for the homely, the ordinary; was it not his boast, his reproach, and his glory, that he found "a tale in everything"; that "the moving accident" was not his trade; and that in humble, everyday life, its peasantry, its flowers, its speech, its "nameless unregarded acts," the best stuff of poetry was to be found? The Romanticism of Coleridge, of Byron, of Scott, of Southey, of Keats, is evident; but, if the cult of the extraordinary and remote is essential to Romanticism, is it consistent, is it reasonable, to call Wordsworth a Romantic?

The answer is that Romanticism claims Wordsworth by virtue of his *imagination.* In the following pages we shall have to hear much about imagination. It is enough to say now that Wordsworth regarded that faculty very seriously; that he conceived himself to possess it in large measure; and that he thought of it as the poet's chief warrant. And while he gloried in choosing lowly themes for poetry, he utterly repudiated the judgment that his poetry itself was lowly. He believed that his imaginative faculty transformed the themes, and transformed them creatively, as we may believe that Divine Power transforms the raw material or primordial protoplasm of the physical universe. The result, according to Wordsworth, was that the common lost its commonness, and gained what Romanticism of

the more ordinary type sought in the preternatural, the remote, the unusual.

When Wordsworth and Coleridge made the famous compact out of which *Lyrical Ballads* sprang in 1798, they agreed upon a division of labour in a joint enterprise. How they did it cannot be better told than in Coleridge's words: "It was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand."

"To excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural;" that was the end which Wordsworth proposed to himself in his poetic operations. It was to be reached by the exercise of imagination, and, by virtue of imagination, he was a fellow-worker with the author of the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

Perhaps we best understand Wordsworth's literary relationships and his place in literary history when we realize his differences from one or two of his predecessors on the one hand, and from some of his famous contemporaries on the other.

Among the predecessors none are more eminent and none more characteristic of the eighteenth century than Pope and Gray. With both Wordsworth thought of himself as in antagonism; against both, at least in certain respects, he led a revolt. Against Pope, indeed, the revolt had begun long before Wordsworth's day, when, in 1756, Joseph Warton published the first volume of his *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope*. The reputation of Pope's successors, of Gray and Ossian and the ballad-editors, was itself a testimony to reaction against the Popian despotism. But Wordsworth was more than ten years old when Dr. Johnson published his *Lives of the Poets*, in which

Pope, though treated with searching critical discrimination, was held up as a genuine and great poet. "Let us look round upon the present time," cried the Doctor, "and back upon the past; let us inquire to whom the voice of mankind has decreed the wreath of poetry; let their productions be examined and their claims stated; and the pretensions of Pope will be no more disputed. Had he given the world only his version [of Homer] the name of poet must have been allowed him." Wordsworth's view of Pope was very different. He admits that he had "melody" and "a polished style," but he considered his great reputation a false one. He hated personal satire, which plays such a large part in the poetry of Dryden and Pope; and he found Pope wanting in the three essentials of poetry—passion, imagination, and truth to Nature. It was chiefly because of his lack of the last-named quality that Wordsworth was in antagonism to Pope. In an admirable sentence he says that Pope "having wandered from humanity [in his *Pastorals*] with boyish inexperience, the praise which these compositions obtained tempted him into a belief that Nature was not to be trusted, at least in pastoral poetry." Pope, like Dryden before him, wrote about Nature as a man born blind might write. And Wordsworth's mission was to show that Nature might be trusted.

"Nature never did betray the heart that loved her."

Wordsworth's revolt against Gray was part of his revolt against "poetic diction." He tried, in practice and in criticism, to break down distinctions between expression in prose and expression in verse; and, rightly or wrongly, he held that Gray did all he could to raise and confirm such distinctions. In other words, he thought Gray an *artificial* poet, and as such, he, the Poet of Nature, felt obliged to treat him as a foe.

Towards the more Romantic of his predecessors, the author of the Ossian poems, and the ballad-writers, and even towards such true landscape lovers as Thomson and Cowper, Wordsworth was very critical. He frankly admits Thomson's inspiration; but he says that he has a vicious style with false ornaments, and that he utters sentimental commonplaces. He mocks at Cowper for his apologetic admiration of "that coarse object, a furze-bush." For Percy's *Reliques*, indeed, he has nothing but

praise. But Ossian! Gray, whose work it is not easy to regard as in any sense Romantic, Gray, the most fastidious of classicists, was delighted with Ossian. When the first instalment appeared, he wrote to Horace Walpole: "Is there any more to be had of equal beauty, or at all approaching to it?" And on a further acquaintance with the poems, he describes himself as "struck, *extasié*, with their infinite beauty."

Wordsworth, for his part, mercilessly tears the unhappy imposture to tatters; he spurs on his somewhat sluggish rhetoric, and decides that the book "is essentially unnatural . . . a forgery audacious as worthless."

With the rank and file of Germano-British Romanticism in prose fiction and in verse, Wordsworth had no sympathy. Reformer among reformers as he was, he took a pessimistic view of the efforts of those who were in some respects his fellow-workers. Like all the reformers, he wished literature to be exciting and stimulating rather than formal and dull; but he held that the ruck of the Romanticists used "gross and violent stimulants" to attain their end. He aimed at passion and emotion, they at sentimentalism and sensationalism; and the result was a degradation of literature. "The invaluable works of our elder writers," he wrote in 1800, "I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse."

Such being Wordsworth's temper, it is a matter of interest to observe his relation to his great poetic contemporaries, and to the younger men who came after them. Coleridge was his dear and life-long friend; and, in *Lyrical Ballads*, one of the land-marks of Romanticism, the *Ancient Mariner* appeared side by side with the *Idiot Boy* and the *Tintern Abbey* lines. Was not the *Ancient Mariner* an "idle and extravagant story in verse," or was it redeemed only by Wordsworth's contributions to it, the tale of the shot albatross and a line or two here and there, and by the moral about cruelty to animals? There is no evidence to show that critical questions greatly disturbed Wordsworth's admiration of and loyalty to his "marvellous" colleague and friend. But we do know that Wordsworth had his doubts about the rank of Coleridge's most distinctively Romantic poetry. We know that he considered that Coleridge's

poetic achievement fell short of his poetic gifts; that the infelicity of his lot had shut him from that sympathy with others, which is granted only to long and tranquil experience, and without which the best poetry, which is a poetry of human nature, cannot be made. And we know, finally, that he regarded the preternatural, which counts for so much in Coleridge, as the *pis aller* of a poet who could not reach the natural.

If Wordsworth thought thus of Coleridge's most famous efforts in poetry, we must be prepared to find him somewhat cold to others of his contemporaries. We should hardly expect him to find spiritual kinship in Byron, whose satirical treatment of him was hardly relieved by even a passing expression of admiration. But what of him who was in R. L. Stevenson's phrase, "far and away the King of the Romantics," what of Walter Scott? Deep was the respect, and genuine the love which the two men had for one another; and much of their work, surely, was done in the same field. Scott was more of a narrative poet than Wordsworth; he had the externalism to which the narrative poet is prone, and his love of pomp and circumstance; and Wordsworth recognized this. In the introduction to *The White Doe of Rylstone* he points out that it was the *inwardness* of historical events that interested him; and that whereas Scott made events march in the orthodox manner towards a catastrophe, he, for his part, was content with an external pageantry of mere failure, so long as it might be made the exponent of some hidden moral victory. But surely in their rendering of Nature, in the loving portraiture of mountain and sky and flower, the two poets were in fullest sympathy and co-operation. Yet Wordsworth does not seem to have felt the sympathy. His criticism of Scott is always depreciatory, and he does not seem to have even dreamed of placing him in a high rank. He recognized Southey's great cleverness and power of narrative in verse; but denied him imagination and inspiration. Burns he loved and reverenced; but could never forget his moral shortcomings, and was curiously insensible of his lyrical merit.

Keats and Shelley were a generation younger than Wordsworth; yet they were as truly reformers and restorers of English poetry as he was. In spite of occasional scoffings, they regarded him as a *doyen;* and the three were linked together against all

artificiality and Philistinism in their art. Yet it does not appear that Wordsworth took any real interest in the work of his two great junior contemporaries.

As the world knows, Wordsworth's unsympathetic critics tried to fix him in a circle of their own drawing. "The Lake School," the "Lakists," such was the circle of Francis Jeffrey's devising: it was a triangle rather, and denoted Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, while it connoted "lakishness," that is to say, poetical incompetence and triviality, parading as affected simplicity, and pretentious philosophy. The *animus* which Jeffrey breathed into others is dead, and the criticism which it moved is obsolete; but the Lake School will live for ever, not as a sect, but as a noble band of pioneers, or say rather as a cluster of satellites about a star, whose brightness, like that in the prophet's vision, shines "out of the North." Nowhere else in Britain, save in the wizard-held borderland, has any limited area of soil been so definitely and solemnly set apart for, and consecrated to, the Muses, as that region of mountain, lake, and gushing streams which is shared by the three counties of Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancaster. Grasmere Vale, with its sweet lake and engirdling hills; Windermere, with its islands, reaching away to the south; the shores of Derwentwater under the stately bulk of Skiddaw; these are the spots where the ghostly presences are thickest. It was a great moment in British literary annals when Wordsworth, a wanderer on the face of the earth, resolved to return to the place of his birth, and live and die there.

> "Many were the thoughts
> Encouraged and dismissed, till choice was made,
> Of a known Vale, whither my feet should turn,
> Nor rest till they had reached the very door
> Of the one cottage which methought I saw."

Nearly as memorable was the July day, six months after the Wordsworths settled at Grasmere, when Coleridge tried to become a respectable householder at Greta Hall, near Keswick. For to Greta Hall, three years later, came Southey; and there he remained for half a century, a centre of strenuous intellectual life long after poor Coleridge had drifted away on his dreary and discreditable course. Wordsworth and Southey were the

two fixed points in the Lake Country to which admirers and settlers resorted. Coleridge was sometimes to be seen. Thomas de Quincey, like Coleridge an opium-eater, one of Wordsworth's sympathetic exponents in the ears of an unbelieving generation, came to be his neighbour for about twenty years. Shelley took his first wife to Keswick and tried, though in vain, to become something of a Lakist. To the shores of Windermere, came "Christopher North" and Mrs. Hemans, both well within Wordsworth's circle. Hardly could that be said of Harriet Martineau, who nevertheless was Wordsworth's fairly intimate neighbour for a few years. But it might surely be said of Thomas Arnold, the great headmaster of Rugby, who was lord of Fox How and Wordsworth's true friend from 1832 to his sudden death ten years later. Whatever share Wordsworth's influence may have had in bringing John Ruskin to spend the afternoon and evening of his days on Coniston Water, it is legitimate to remark on the fitting juxtaposition of the two men who, more than any other Englishmen of the nineteenth century, or perhaps in any age, were the interpreters of Nature's message to mankind.

The poet who dwelt in so imperial a solitude and in so royal a company remains, after the criticism of a hundred years has done its worst and best on him, somewhat of an enigmatical figure. That which the blunt insensibility of the early critics scorned as "lakishness," was undoubtedly there, in the man, his genius and his work ; and, though we no longer scorn it, we are sometimes daunted and sometimes perplexed by it. In the climate of poetry we expect sunshine and balmy airs ; in Wordsworth we feel, now and again, a chill and blight which spoil one's pleasure. Whence come this east wind and these dull skies? Why does Wordsworth's poetry seem so unequal in value, so apt to fail in charm? How can one who sometimes, who often, rises so high, sink at times so low? How should so transcendent and so inartificial a poet fail to know when he is writing mere dull prose in conventional form of verse? Or is it we, his readers, who are at fault, and not Wordsworth? Is it only that we are but partially initiated, and that, with more perfectly purged ears, we should hear nothing but music?

These questions are put only that they may be deprecated

and dismissed. It is best to take Wordsworth as he took himself, quite seriously, and to dwell with him for a season, not so much that we may reconsider him critically, not that we may make a new attempt to "place" him, not that we may sift what we like in his poetry from what we dislike, but that we may know him as he was, and try to be worthy of his friendship.

Some things we shall do well to grasp firmly at the outset. There were certain features in Wordsworth which give a kind of gnarled structure to his character and his poetry. He insisted on reconciling and combining certain things which are often kept apart, and which some people think should always be kept apart. Imagination and morality are two such things. In Wordsworth's estimation, imagination was the mainspring of poetry. When he speaks about imagination in prose, Wordsworth tries to be logical and precise; but when he speaks of it in poetry, he uses language of that vaguely adumbrative kind which one has to be content with in presence of transcendent religious ideas. And, indeed, Wordsworth's feeling about imagination was *quasi*-religious. Imagination was *creative* energy, in using which the poet was transmitting Divine power. And so has many another poet thought of it—so far, at least, as its prerogatives go. Many poets and many critics have claimed for genius the absolutism of a Divine right, as though it could make its own rules or dispense with rules of any kind; as if it had its own atmosphere and independent *criteria*. But no such claim did Wordsworth make. For him imagination had rules as stringent as its power was divine. Not for one instant did he conceive of his art as exercised in a non-moral way, representing, without any preference that was not purely æsthetic, the facts of life for pleasure's sake only. Wordsworth's morality makes him enigmatic and hard to approach. There would be no enigma in the matter if we could class him as a didactic poet, as one who simply sought to recommend religion and morality in good verse. From some of his writing about his own work, some of the letters in which he spoke with least formality about his own purposes, we might almost conclude that he aimed at nothing but the crudest didacticism. But, if his achievement had been of this kind, his name might have been conspicuous in the annals of morality and religion, but could not have stood where all men now find it, in the front

rank of English poetry. When Wordsworth thought carefully about his poetry, he made it plain that its object was *artistic;* he spoke of pleasure as his end, with a frankness which might satisfy the most ardent devotee of art for art's sake. And indeed his practice speaks as eloquently as his theory. In all his central poetic work he sings of the human and the Divine at their meeting-points with the vagueness of the poet, not the definiteness of the moralist or theologian. Yet it is not always so; occasions are frequent when he seems to lapse into the didactic; when the mood which he creates is too serious to be called pleasure, and the truth which he enforces is too austere to be called beauty. And the reader of Wordsworth will often be embarrassed by the apparently conflicting efforts of such imagination as Shakespeare might have done obeisance to, and such mere moral reflectiveness as seems anything but imaginative. He is troubled by an uncomfortable antithesis between philosophy and profit; and he is surprised that the poet seems to have felt so little the discomfort that is so irksome to him. He wonders whether Wordsworth's imagination acted intermittently; whether his genius was a kind of mechanical mixture of gold and clay; or whether a more patient and intense study may not show some higher unity in which the contradiction is resolved.

Another knot in the Wordsworthian structure which forces the reader to exert himself, is the political element in his genius and poetry. He has to realize, in fact, that the two cardinal things in Wordsworth are his passion for Nature and his passion for public liberty, and that the latter passion is as strong as the former. He once told an American visitor, the Rev. Orville Dewey, that he had given twelve hours' thought to the condition and prospects of society for one to poetry; and we can believe it. We find that, strictly speaking, even Wordsworth's best poetry of Nature has a social and political source; that not until the impulses of his boyhood had been chastened by social experience and political shocks, was he able to *interpret* Nature at all. The whole of his early manhood was determined by England's active hostility to France; by the shock and the shame of finding his country at war—so it seemed to him—with the struggle for liberty of a neighbouring land. His best poetry was made as the result of, and in reaction from, that shock;

through it mainly he heard "the still, sad music of humanity;" and he first truly knew Nature as the healer of a soul thus suffering. Not less true is it, though perhaps less widely known, that the main bent of his genius in middle life was determined by another political shock, the revelation of the aims of Napoleon. A common, and not wholly erroneous, way of putting this matter is to represent Wordsworth as having changed his political opinions from something not far short of republicanism to a Toryism that would admit no thought of compromise. But the change was more dramatic. No reader of the *Sonnets Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty* can miss the wonderful ring of their passionate patriotism, or will be surprised to learn that such passion had a powerful and very definite cause. It was in 1793 that Wordsworth's love of England was shocked by her hostility to the French Revolution; it was in 1807, when he knew that Swiss liberty had been destroyed by Napoleon, that his sympathies forsook a nation which could suffer its destinies to be moulded by such a tyrant. Even as late as September, 1806, the solemn hymn on the dying of Charles James Fox shows that Wordsworth was not alienated from the statesman whose sympathy with the French had been so constant. When the Genius of Liberty, the "High-souled Maid," was driven from the sound of her Alpine torrent, the poet's patriotism became less anxious and more passionate; but it was none the less a passion for freedom and the impartial sway of righteous law.

Then, when the tyrant was overthrown, the passion fell, and the poet passed into that mood of undisturbed tranquillity with which we most easily associate him. In theory he had always insisted on tranquillity as the necessary solvent of poetic emotion; he defined poetry as *emotion recollected in tranquillity*, and he had always, in some measure, realized the theory. For the last twenty-five or thirty years of his life, the pulse of emotion was feeble, and there seemed little but tranquil reflection left. These uncertain relations between emotion and tranquillity make a difficulty for the student of Wordsworth. The idea of Browning's *Lost Leader* haunts him; and though he may have no word of political blame for the eager revolutionist who became so stern a Conservative, he can hardly help feeling that the poet whom he hailed as the herald of a

new age seemed to become a mere holder of forlorn hopes, a timid and obstinate opponent of essays towards freedom in almost all directions.

It is, indeed, at once Wordsworth's weakness and his glory that the tranquillity of his genius put him to some extent out of sympathy with the adventurous temper of the nineteenth century. For if it is part of the business of a great poet to lead the van in the conflict of his age, it is surely not alien from his office to proclaim the peace which passeth all understanding apart from which the stress of battle would be unendurable; to sing in the ears of a generation much given to change of "a repose which ever is the same." Wordsworth lived long enough to witness many reactions; and perhaps, when we know him better, we shall come to feel that both flow and ebb were less marked in him than in the periods in which he lived. Perhaps, as in fancy we grow with his growth, share his companionship and compare our poet with contemporary leaders of thought and action as they speak for themselves, we shall learn to rate higher that perfect self-control, those "sober certainties," that philosophic mind which were the conquest of Wordsworth's years. We may find that the conquest was won earlier than we knew or he realized, and that the thought which underlies his work from first to last was more timeless and less dependent upon either external events or changes of mood than at first sight appears. Wordsworth was, after all, a philosopher; and it is a poor philosophy which does not transcend the changing appearances of the time in which it utters itself.

One thing the associate of Wordsworth is sure to feel as a mere drawback, and that is his lack of humour. Probably this lack, so common yet always so lamentable, apparently so unimportant but really so far-reaching in its power of hindrance and harm, is one of the chief sources of what is unpleasant in the "lakishness" of Wordsworth. It makes it possible to feel his poetry *old-fashioned:* an epithet complimentary to furniture and landscape-gardening, but hardly to poetry. For poetry, at all events of the rank of Wordsworth's, should always be fresh, fresh with the eternal freshness of the spring or the morning. And if this freshness, this unmistakable, inexpressible, irresistible gusto is sometimes lacking in Wordsworth, is it not very often because humour is weak? For humour is much

more than the parent of wit, though this is not to be despised in poetry. It is a phase of intelligence, an exercise of sympathy ; and the lack of it involves, possibly earnestness, but certainly dulness, and some insensitiveness, both of the understanding and the affections. Such insensitiveness was undoubtedly present in Wordsworth ; and it prevented the man, as it prevents his poetry, from being wholly and unfailingly fresh and charming. It explains also the occasional lapses into individual self-satisfaction which flaw the noble self-consciousness of the great poet. For humour, even better than humility, makes a man immune from the possibility of conceit.

Wordsworth's fame, like his genius, suffered great vicissitudes. "Forty and seven years it is," wrote De Quincey in 1845, "since William Wordsworth first appeared as an author (*i.e.* since the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*). Twenty of those years he was the scoff of the world, and his poetry a by-word of scorn. Since then, and more than once, Senates have rung with acclamations to the echo of his name." But as to one phase of his life there was no vicissitude. From a certain day in his eager youth, of which we shall hear in the next chapter, when on his way home from a night of innocent pleasure through growing light he passed through one of those decisive crises which few men and women with souls are unfortunate enough to miss, Wordsworth was the priest and prophet of Nature, almost exclusively identified with the lakeland of Northern England. There he was born ; thither, before his youth had quite faded, he returned ; there he lay down to die ; there, under its modest headstone, rests his dust. All else, Cambridge, London, France, even happy and fruitful hours in Dorset and Somerset, was either education or episode. One cannot know Wordsworth without understanding the English Lakes.

CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD AND BOYHOOD AMONG THE LAKES

IN a passage of fine, lucid, old-fashioned prose Wordsworth himself has described the main features of the English lakeland. He asks the reader "to place himself, in imagination, on some given point; let it be the top of either of the mountains, Great Gavel, or Scawfell; or, rather, let us suppose our station to be a cloud hanging midway between those two mountains, at not more than half a mile's distance from the summit of each, and not many yards above their highest elevation; we shall there see stretched at our feet a number of valleys, not fewer than eight, diverging from the point on which we are supposed to stand, like spokes from the nave of a wheel. First, we note, lying to the south-east, the vale of Langdale, which will conduct the eye to the long lake of Winandermere, stretched nearly to the sea; or rather to the sands of the vast bay of Morecambe, serving here for the rim of this imaginary wheel; let us trace it in a direction from the south-east towards the south, and we shall next fix our eyes upon the vale of Coniston, running up likewise from the sea, but not (as all the other valleys do) to the nave of the wheel, and therefore it may be not inaptly represented as a broken spoke sticking in the rim. Looking forth again . . . we see immediately at our feet the vale of Duddon. . . . The fourth vale, next to be observed, viz. that of the Esk, is of the same general character as the last. . . . Next, almost due west, look down into, and along the deep valley of Wastdale, with its little chapel and . . . neat dwellings scattered upon a plain of meadow and corn-ground. . . . Beyond the little fertile plain lies, within a bed of steep mountains, the long, narrow, stern, and desolate lake of Wastdale. . . . Next comes in view Ennerdale, with its lake of bold and

somewhat savage shores. . . . The vale of Buttermere, with the lake and village of that name, and Crummock-water, beyond, next present themselves. We will follow the main stream, the Coker, through the fertile and beautiful vale of Lorton, till it is lost in the Derwent, below the noble ruins of Cockermouth Castle. Lastly, Borrowdale, of which the vale of Keswick is only a continuation, stretching due north, brings us to a point nearly opposite to the vale of Winandermere, with which we began. . . . The image of a wheel, thus far exact, is little more than one-half complete ; but the deficiency on the eastern side may be supplied by the vales of Wytheburn, Ullswater, Haweswater, and the vale of Grasmere and Rydal ; none of these, however, run up to the central point. . . . From this take a flight of not more than four or five miles eastward to the ridge of Helvellyn, and you will look down upon Wytheburn and St. John's Vale, which are a branch of the vale of Keswick ; upon Ullswater, stretching due east ; and not far beyond to the south-east . . . lie the vale and lake of Haweswater ; and lastly, the vale of Grasmere, Rydal, and Ambleside, brings you back to Winandermere."

The mere symmetry of this region, however, is nothing to its concentration, to the thick sowing and close company of its beauties. Surely on no other equally small space of the earth's surface is there such unity in variety ; nowhere are there such a majestic type and such delightful surprises. Wordsworth's "image of a wheel" gives no idea of the wealth and intricate grouping of mountains, the abundance of lakes, the individuality of valleys. And though three counties contribute, the result, in mere area, is so small! For we must not think of the highlands of the West Riding, the wild hills and dales of the Pennines, as part of the Lake District. Physically and spiritually, regarded either geologically or scenically, they lie outside it. The sweeping, lakeless dales of Western Yorkshire with the slopes of mountain limestone that bound them, belong to another order of things from the Silurian uplands and big volcanic and granitic hills enclosing the lakes and tarns, and sending down the hurrying "becks" of Westmorland and Cumberland. The valley of the Lune, which joins the sea below Lancaster, or the main line of the London and North Western Railway may be held to mark, with practical, though not with geological, accuracy, the slight but most real boundary. At Kendal, or at

Penrith, you stand outside the Lakes, just as you do on the flat wastes of Morecambe or of Solway. The whole of little Westmorland, a protruding tongue of Lancashire, a bit of Cumberland: that is all. "O Love," the poets might have apostrophized their paradise,

> "O Love, thy province were not large,
> A bounded field, nor stretching far."

The central point of the region is the pleasant little mountain town of Ambleside in Westmorland. Stand just outside it, or look down on it from high ground on either side of Windermere, and you see the heart of the district laid open before you. Seeming close to the lake, though a short mile from the actual wash of its waters, the dark houses lie at the very bases of the mountains, and the valleys stretch away from the quiet streets. Far to the west, you catch a glimpse of the highest height of all, the highest height in England—Scafell Pike and its neighbour Scafell. Belonging, for the eye at least, to the same group, are the Coniston Fells, dear to Ruskin, and the two knobs of the Langdale Pikes. These are the "lusty twins" on which the "Solitary" of Wordsworth's *Excursion* looked from his cottage-window by Blea Tarn, and those who know the Lakes at all feel, like him, that they are "prized companions." Let us learn at once to associate them with the great lines in which their spiritual meaning is given.

> "Many are the notes
> Which, in his tuneful course, the wind draws forth
> From rocks, woods, caverns, heaths, and dashing shores;
> And well those lofty brethren bear their part
> In the wild concert—chiefly when the storm
> Rides high; then all the upper air they fill
> With roaring sound, that ceases not to flow,
> Like smoke, along the level of the blast,
> In mighty current; theirs, too, is the song
> Of stream and headlong flood that seldom fails;
> And, in the grim and breathless hour of noon,
> Methinks that I have heard them echo back
> The thunder's greeting. Nor have Nature's laws
> Left them ungifted with a power to yield
> Music of finer tone; a harmony,
> So do I call it, though it be the hand
> Of silence, though there be no voice;—the clouds,
> The mist, the shadows, light of golden suns,

Motions of moonlight, all come thither—
Touch, and have an answer—thither come, and shape
A language not unwelcome to sick hearts
And idle spirits :—there the sun himself,
At the calm close of summer's longest day,
Rests his substantial orb ;—between those heights
And on the top of either pinnacle,
More keenly than elsewhere in night's blue vault,
Sparkle the stars, as of their station proud.
Thoughts are not busier in the mind of man
Than the mute agents stirring there."

Before we turn our eyes away from the Langdales and their peers, let us see what the Solitary saw there one day at the clearing of a mist.

"A step
A single step, that freed me from the skirts
Of the blind vapour, opened to my view
Glory beyond all glory ever seen
By waking sense or by the dreaming soul !
The appearance, instantaneously disclosed,
Was of a mighty city—boldly say
A wilderness of building, sinking far
And self-withdrawn into a boundless depth,
Far sinking into splendour—without end !
Fabric it seemed of diamond and of gold,
With alabaster domes and silver spires,
And blazing terrace upon terrace, high
Uplifted ; here, serene pavilions bright,
In avenues disposed ; there, towers begirt
With battlements that on their restless fronts
Bore stars—illumination of all gems !
By earthly nature had the effect been wrought
Upon the dark materials of the storm
Now pacified ; on them, and on the coves
And mountain-steeps and summits, whereunto
The vapours had receded, taking these
Their station under a cerulean sky.
Oh, 'twas an unimaginable sight !
Clouds, mists, streams, watery rocks and emerald turf,
Clouds of all tincture, rocks and sapphire sky,
Confused, commingled, mutually inflamed,
Molten together, and composing thus
Each lost in each, that marvellous array
Of temple, palace, citadel, and huge
Fantastic pomp of structure without name,
In fleecy folds voluminous, enwrapped.

Right in the midst, where interspace appeared
Of open court, an object like a throne
Under a shining canopy of state
Stood fixed ; and fixed resemblances were seen
To implements of ordinary use,
But vast in size, in substance glorified ;
Such as by Hebrew Prophets were beheld
In vision-forms uncouth of mightiest power
For admiration and mysterious awe.
This little Vale, a dwelling-place of Man,
Lay low beneath my feet ; 'twas visible—
I saw not, but I felt that it was there.
That which I *saw* was the revealed abode
Of spirits in beatitude : my heart
Swelled in my breast—'I have been dead,' I cried,
'And now I live ! '"

The soft velvety valley along which the eye travels to the Langdales is the valley of the Brathay; and from its heights there descends to the westward that "River Duddon," to which Wordsworth was to write so many sonnets. Loughrigg, with its many memories, divides it from the valley of the Rothay or Rotha, a valley which seems to lead straight north to the gloomy bulk of Fairfield. A nearer view would show that it is the Rydal stream which comes from those formidable heights, and that the Rothay comes from the north-westward. It comes, in fact, from Helvellyn through Grasmere, which is folded among the hills under Dunmail Raise, over which you can see the gray thread of road making towards Thirlmere and Keswick. To the right of that road you catch a glimpse of the top of Helvellyn. On the other, eastern side of Fairfield beyond Wansfell, you see another road climbing to a summit: that is Kirkstone Pass, leading to Ullswater. Other hills, below the gigantic dimensions of Fairfield and Helvellyn, but how rich in story!—come out clear. There is Nab Scar below Fairfield, where Wordsworth's ghost, and Dorothy's, must walk ; there, looking down on Grasmere from the west, is Silver How; and there, further north, keeping guard over Easedale, is the Helm, with the Old Woman crouching on the top. In that one view (and you need spend no long time over it) you will embrace the central features of the district. One other bit of Wordsworth's most fanciful verse will fix them for us. It is from that poem *On the Naming of Places* addressed *To Joanna*,

and describes the effect of a wild girl's laughter among the hills. The poet was admiring the view from Grasmere :—

> "When I had gazed perhaps two minutes' space,
> Joanna, looking in my eyes, beheld
> That ravishment of mine, and laughed aloud.
> The Rock, like something starting from a sleep,
> Took up the lady's voice, and laughed again ;
> That ancient Woman seated on Helm-crag
> Was ready with her cavern ; Hammar-scar,
> And the tall steep of Silver-how, sent forth
> A noise of laughter ; southern Loughrigg heard,
> And Fairfield answered with a mountain tone ;
> Helvellyn far into the clear blue sky
> Carried the Lady's voice,—old Skiddaw blew
> His speaking-trumpet ;—back out of the clouds
> Of Glaramara southward came the voice ;
> And Kirkstone tossed it from his misty head."

The mention of Skiddaw and Glaramara reminds us, as we look over Ambleside to the mountains, of what lies beyond the barrier. From the heights of Glaramara the streams descend northwards ; and, in particular, the Derwent, flowing through Borrowdale, expands into Derwentwater, the most perfect, perhaps, of all the lakes ; rushes past Keswick, where it is joined by the Greta from Thirlmere ; disappears in the long lake of Bassenthwaite, and thence flows in a pleasant valley to the Irish Sea at Workington. All this region, with Borrowdale and the Vale of St. John as its avenues of approach, is dominated by the great granitic masses of Skiddaw and Blencathara with their bare sides. Neither of these can be seen from our view-point near Ambleside ; and the places on which they look are not rich in central Wordsworthian associations. They belong rather to Coleridge and Southey—to Coleridge, who found out Greta Hall on its mound by the Greta just outside Keswick, and to Southey, who spent in that house half a century of quiet and laborious days. Yet Skiddaw and the Derwent were dear to Wordsworth, and for a very good reason.

Halfway between Keswick and Workington, where the Derwent flows, broad and tranquil, but still with quick pace and whence the outlines of Skiddaw are blue with the haze of distance, stands the market-town of Cockermouth. You can see at once that it has a busy present-day life, and also that it is

rich in associations with a distant past. Its broad main street is both busy and dignified; its two streams (Derwent and its tributary the Cocker, which comes from Buttermere and her neighbour lakes) feed some busy mills, while from the high ground on the right of the rivers, the remains of a mediæval castle look down. On your right, as you walk along the main street westward, you come upon a house which is evidently, even now, the handsomest house in the town. It is not a poetical house; indeed, its many windowed frontage, its high walls and heavy gates almost suggest a public institution rather than a home. Behind it, a garden slopes shortly down to the Derwent.

In that house, unchanged since then, Wordsworth was born in 1770, on April 7th. His father, Richard Wordsworth, was an attorney, well to do, as the character of his house testifies, and agent to the Lord Lonsdale of his time. The Wordsworths were Yorkshire people, the poet's grandfather, father of the Cockermouth attorney, being the first immigrant into lake-land. Richard, the attorney, strengthened his hold on the district by marrying Anne Cookson of Penrith, the daughter of a tradesman there, who had, however, tempered his civic blood by taking to wife a Crackanthorp of Newbiggen Hall. At Cockermouth were also born the rest of Richard Wordsworth's children, an elder brother of the poet, Richard, a London attorney, who died in 1816; Dorothy, a year and a half younger than William; John, the sailor, of whom we shall hear much in the sequel; and Christopher, the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1820 to 1841. He died in 1846, four years before his brother. He was the father of two bishops, Christopher, Bishop of Lincoln, and Charles, Bishop of St. Andrews; and grandfather of Dr. John Wordsworth, the present (1907) bishop of Salisbury.

Wordsworth was thus a northerner to the core, a child hardy and hard-featured. Yorkshire blood, Westmorland blood: the dales and the fells and the rapid brooks; such was the material, such were the surroundings, the nursery, of this austere and yet most English poet, of this nobly conventional, yet most fearlessly natural soul. There was nothing in the near neighbourhood of Cockermouth to pamper poetic taste; Skiddaw and Blencathara were too far off, and the fields and uplands were tame.

WORDSWORTH'S BIRTHPLACE AT COCKERMOUTH

Two things only there were which breathed romance; the high-pitched castle of the thirteenth century, where Mary Stewart was harboured after Langside and her landing at Workington; and the broad and clear waters of the Derwent with their tidings of the lakes and hills. The child made the most of both. He chased butterflies on the castle-hill; he rejoiced in the yellow summer-flowers that shone on its green slopes; he ventured awestruck into the darkness of its dungeon. Coming back as an old man he hears the spirit of the place speak to him.

> "Thou look'st upon me, and dost fondly think,
> Poet! that, stricken as both are by years,
> We, differing once so much, are now Compeers,
> Prepared, when each has stood his time, to sink
> Into the dust. Erewhile a sterner link
> United us; when thou, in boyish play,
> Entering my dungeon, didst become a prey
> To soul-appalling darkness. Not a blink
> Of light was there;—and thus did I, thy Tutor,
> Make thy young thoughts acquainted with the grave;
> While those went chasing the winged butterfly
> Through my green courts; or climbing, a bold suitor,
> Up to the flowers whose golden progeny
> Still round my shattered brow in beauty wave."

The romance of the river, with its living voice, was more congenial to this child. It was born in the eagle's haunts; in its modest valley, it kept green a wreath fairer than that of the proudest Roman conqueror. To the imagination of the man it was "the fairest of all rivers;" its voice, as he said, "flowed along" the dreams of his childhood. Into the streets, with their "fretful dwellings," it breathed something of Nature's own calm. The garden of the big house sloped down to the blue stream, and was "a tempting playmate." In its backwaters the little boy would bathe all day long, and then scamper about among the ragwort on its sandy fields like a naked savage. It was, as he said, "fair seed-time" for his soul; and he grew up "fostered by beauty."

When school-time arrived, he went a step nearer the central beauty. Let us go back for a moment to our view-point on the high ground south of Ambleside. Hitherto, so fascinated have we been by the mountain panorama to the north, that we have

given no look or thought to the expanse of Windermere behind us, to the low, soft heights that make its banks; its islands, and its woods to the water's edge. Nor have we lingered long on the Coniston Fells and the "Old Man," so strong was the attraction of the Langdale Pikes just beyond them. Cross Windermere by its famous ferry, just south of the largest of the islands, and then climb the heights westward, as if you were making for the Coniston Fells. You are in that bit of Lancashire which helps to form the Lake district; and, for a time, when a turn of the road has banished the last visible fragment of Windermere, you seem quite removed from all the ordinary associations of the Lakes. Suddenly, as you dip down westward, you drop upon an unexciting lake with rushy banks, parallel to Windermere, along which the road runs northward. It is Esthwaite Water. Follow the road the full length of the lake, and you become aware of a large village of dark grey houses climbing towards a long church on a hill, looking like an island in the flats by which the lake is bounded on the north. Entering the village, you have a sense of much quaintness, and also of some importance. There are real streets in the place, climbing and twisting curiously, with archways thrown across here and there. Above all there is the dominance of the long church with its graveyard on the hill. As you stand by its door you see that you have much the same view as you had before. For there in front of you is the great mountain-barrier; there is the central paradise.

This large village, or little town, is Hawkshead. At the eastern foot of the church-hill you see school buildings, some old, some recently restored. The Hawkshead grammar-school is an old and famous foundation. It was founded in 1585 by Edwin Sandys, Archbishop of York, one of the most praiseworthy of the Elizabethan divines, and in the eighteenth century had a high reputation in the north. To Hawkshead school all the Wordsworth boys were sent; and William was there from 1778 when he was eight, until 1787, when he was sixteen, and went up to St. John's College, Cambridge. He was boarded with a dame called Ann Tyson, in a house by one of the archways.

Wordsworth's school life was very important in his spiritual development, and it is clearly reflected in his poetry. He learned much from his excellent schoolmasters; much from the

ANN TYSON'S HOUSE AT HAWKSHEAD

wholesome conditions of normal companionship and boyish sport; most of all from that teaching of Nature in which the waters and shores of Esthwaite carried on the lessons of Derwent. In the psychology of poetic adolescence, as a study of the degrees by which a rather ordinary boy climbs, and climbs naturally, to be a poet, nothing could be more significant than Wordsworth's school-time at Hawkshead. He went there a healthy, rather passionate child; he left it still healthy, still passionate, but with new elements of health and fresh food for passion. His simplest experiences in that plain village, by that tame lake, were part of a most transcendent training, and some of them are among the permanent poetic riches of the race. Even Ann Tyson, and her cottage by the archway, the little boy's second nursery, went beyond themselves in their mission. "Why should I speak," Wordsworth asks—

> "Why should I speak of what a thousand hearts
> Have felt, and every man alive can guess?"

Yet it was well, even for a great poet, to record the charm of that cottage home, the stone table under the pine tree, the imprisoned brook in the garden, the moon seen from the boy's bed—

> "In splendour couched among the leaves
> Of a tall ash, that near our cottage stood";

how,

> "In the dark summit of the waving tree,
> She rocked with every impulse of the breeze,"

for these simple sensuous impressions were the first stage of a spiritual experience such as had never before been told, they were the alphabet of that poetry of common life which it was Wordsworth's mission to add to the poetry of the world.

Nearer the heart of things was the idealization of one of the Hawkshead teachers, that mysterious village schoolmaster, "with hair of glittering gray," that "Matthew" who never lived, save for the poet himself, and his lovers, that "delicate creation" of the poet's mind for which a worthy concrete man supplied the initial suggestion. The Rev. William Taylor, we have every reason to believe, an M.A. of Cambridge, and headmaster of Hawkshead School from 1782 to 1786, was one, and only

one, of Matthew's prototypes. He died while Wordsworth was at school, and the poet has made the circumstances of his death poetically memorable. But it is the abstract "Matthew" who has the true immortality, and who walks still in the vale of Esthwaite, and will walk, we may predict, for ever. He is the eternal type of that rare and exquisite thing, age as companion on equal terms of youth : he stands, too, for the moral triumph of cheerful serenity over the pathos of long survival and the memories of ancient sorrow. Wordsworth introduces his name as inscribed on a tablet in the school. He pauses on it, and recalls the personality, its lights and shadows.

"The sighs which Matthew heaved were sighs
Of one tired out with fun and madness ;
The tears which came to Matthew's eyes
Were tears of light, the deed of gladness.

"Yet sometimes, when the secret cup
Of still and serious thought went round,
It seemed as if he drank it up—
He felt with spirit so profound."

It was Matthew, and it was by Esthwaite Lake—

"When life was sweet, I knew not why,"

who rallied William Wordsworth on his dreaminess, and was answered (so in afterthought it seemed), in the technical phraseology of the new philosophy of Nature.

"The eye—it cannot choose but see ;
We cannot bid the ear be still ;
Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
Against or with our will.

"Nor less I deem that there are Powers
Which of themselves our minds impress ;
That we can feed this mind of ours
In a wise passiveness.

"Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking?

"Then ask not wherefore, here, alone,
Conversing as I may,
I sit upon this old grey stone,
And dream my time away."

In "memory's shadowy moonshine" this mystical schoolmaster more and more took the shape of Wordsworth's typical elemental person, the plain countryman in a simple beautiful place, who knows, the better for his simplicity, the heights and depths of joy and sorrow. To Matthew belong the twin-poems, *The Two April Mornings* and *The Fountain*, written in 1799, which breathe the purest Wordsworthianism, and which are relevant here because they show what came of early Hawkshead impressions.

If ordinary companionship led to these extraordinary poetic results, so the boyish occupations and sports of the Hawkshead scholar were a natural initiation into the metaphysics of poetry. The mere external details of those days are given in *The Prelude* with the reminiscent garrulity of autobiographic blank verse. We are told of skating, nutting, dancing, loo or whist parties on winter nights, woodcock-catching by moonlight. But we are also told (and this is what interests us, this is what makes the autobiography poetic), how this ordinary boyish experience turned out to be the training of a poet's soul.

In the poem called *Nutting*, for example, which was intended to be part of the *Prelude*, we are shown how things seen lead to those things which are not seen, but are of the eternity of poetry. Years afterwards, when the poet thought over happy days among the hazel-coppices on the borders of Esthwaite, he remembered one day in particular—a red-letter day in the history of his feeling for Nature. Regarded merely sensuously, the day was delicious—

> "——It seems a day
> (I speak of one from many singled out)
> One of those heavenly days that cannot die."

Well protected by shabby clothes against the terrors of thickets, the boy entered the autumnal woods, bent on ravage. In their depths was—

> "One dear nook
> Unvisited, where not a broken bough
> Drooped with its withered leaves, ungracious sign
> Of devastation; but the hazels rose
> Tall and erect, with tempting clusters hung
> A virgin scene!——"

For a time the young deflowerer watched his victim in mood of perfect sensuous satisfaction—

> "A little while I stood
> Breathing with such suppression of the heart
> As joy delights in; and with wise restraint
> Voluptuous, fearless of a rival, eyed
> The banquet."

He was—

> "In that sweet mood when pleasure loves to play
> Tribute to ease; and of its joy secure,
> The heart luxuriates with indifferent things
> Wasting its kindliness on stocks and stones
> And on the vacant air."

And now the boy summons his energies to do the commonplace thing—

> "Then up I rose
> And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash,
> And merciless ravage; and the shady nook
> Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
> Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
> Their quiet being."

So far, we have a most ordinary situation, distinguished only by the beauty of its presentment. But now mark what happens. In the moment of full sensuous gratification, when the clusters are at his feet, and the ruined trees are quivering from the robbery, the boy feels—or is it that the man, the developed poet, reads his present feelings back into the boy's?—a strange compunction. There suddenly dawns on his acquisitive, materialistic soul, the vision of Nature as *life*—life which is an end in itself, and not a mere instrument of human gratification. He thinks of his act not as gain, but as injury—something that has hurt, something to be resented, regretted.

> "Ere from the mutilated bower I turned
> Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,
> I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
> The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky."

And so, recalling it all long afterwards, he exhorts Dorothy, who, surely, had little need of the exhortation—

> "Then, dearest maiden, move along these shades,
> In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
> Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods."

"*There is a spirit in the woods.*" This, which in other poets might be a mere play of illusory fancy, is, in Wordsworth, a dogmatic statement of objective fact.

The same kind of spiritualizing process took place with school-companionships. Common schoolboys, like common schoolmasters, were touched by, and became part of, the unearthly sublimity of Nature. "William Raincock, of Rayrigg," was an adept in the art of mimicking owls by hooting through his fingers; and he died before he was twelve. Wordsworth idealizes him and his accomplishment and his fate, so that they are as much part of Windermere as its waters or its woods.

> "There was a Boy; ye knew him well, ye cliffs
> And islands of Winander!"

Wonderful as were the effects of echoing sound which the lad could produce, there were moments when he failed, when—

> "There came a pause
> Of silence, such as baffled his best skill!"

At such moments the Spirit of Nature laid her hand on him, and play was changed into poetry—

> "Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
> Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
> Has carried far into his heart the voice
> Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scenes
> Would enter unawares into his mind
> With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
> Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
> Into the bosom of the steady lake."

And if this trivial experience was replete with spiritual suggestion even to the child, much more so was the sight of his untimely grave to the poet, his friend. The Hawkshead churchyard—

> "Hangs
> Upon a slope above the village school;
> And, through that churchyard when my way has led
> On summer evenings, I believe, that there
> A long half-hour together I have stood
> Mute—looking at the grave in which he lies!"

In other experiences the imaginative and spiritual training was more direct and decisive. The sense of something behind

natural appearances, of a spiritual unity at once beautiful, awful, and incomprehensible, was born out of one experience after another. When the boy was going at night round the woodcock-snares set by him and his companions, he would be tempted to take more than his own share, and then he would fancy himself pursued by invisible feet, and the night-breeze would play the detective. So might any guilty boy feel. But not every boy, climbing the rocks to see a raven's nest in broad daylight, would suspect, as Wordsworth did, the preternatural (shall we call it ?) in the natural.

> "While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
> With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
> Blow through my ear !—the sky seemed not a sky
> Of earth—and with what motion moved the clouds !"

Gradually the sense strengthened of spiritual depth in Nature, of natural appearances as symbolic and prophetic. The boating and skating scenes on Esthwaite and Windermere are well known. One summer evening the boy shot out in a boat on Esthwaite in defiance of rules. Moonlight lay on the water—

> "Far above
> Was nothing but the stars and the gray sky."

The consciousness of wrong-doing was present but not strong ; it was an element, but only one element, of an emotional excitement in which it disappeared. In the glamour of the night, the boy made towards "a craggy ridge" on the horizon : suddenly there shot up behind it, as if on the impulse of a living will, a higher height, a peak black in the moonlight. As it grew in size and definiteness it became a terrifying thing ; and at last young Wordsworth had to turn his boat and go back, feeling all the while as if "the grim shape" were following him. In serious mood he walked across the meadows to Hawkshead ; and for days he could not lose the impressions of that night.

What were the impressions ? He tells us ; but it is not easy to translate such things into words with their irritating and impotent definiteness. His healthy boy's brain was troubled with a sense of the undetermined, the unknown ; Nature seemed to wear no longer her simple, pleasant, intelligible features, but

to be haunted by "huge and mighty forms," gigantic presences, alive, but not with the life of men.

So it seemed at the moment; but, years afterwards, he came to know, and to be able to express better, what was happening to him at such times. He came to realize that this vague feeling of ghostliness among the things of sense was the childish apprehension of nothing less than Deity in Nature, of the "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe," the "Soul that is the eternity of Thought." He realized that such experiences had greater magnitude and significance than they seemed to have, that they were part of a training of which it was not ridiculous, but perfectly fitting to speak in language grandiloquent and sublime. He realized that Nature—spiritual, alive, one—was in such things beginning to train, discipline, purify him. The experiences were to be understood as constituting intercourse, fellowship, of person with person; fellowship in which there was both intelligence and passion—

> "Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
> Thou Soul, that art the eternity of thought!
> That givest to forms and images a breath
> And everlasting motion! not in vain,
> By day or star-light, thus from my first dawn
> Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
> The passions that build up our human soul;
> Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man,
> But with high objects, with enduring things—
> With life and nature—purifying thus
> The elements of feeling and of thought,
> And sanctifying by such discipline
> Both pain and fear, until we recognize
> A grandeur in the beatings of the heart."

As time went on, the fellowship between the schoolboy and Nature became so frequent as to be almost habitual—

> "Mine was it in the fields both day and night,
> And by the waters, all the summer long."

It came through ordinary experiences, outings, amusements—

> "Oft amid those fits of vulgar joy
> Which, through all seasons, on a child's pursuits
> Are prompt attendants, 'mid that giddy bliss
> Which, like a tempest, works along the blood

> And is forgotten; even then I felt
> Gleams like the flashing of a shield;—the earth
> And common face of Nature spoke to me
> Rememberable things."

Yet the boy became neither a prig nor a sentimentalist. He skated none the less vigorously that a melancholy note was sent by the hills to mix with the tumult on the ice, or that he occasionally paused, "reclining back upon his heels," to watch the solemn fall of night. The sense of Nature's presence lost its terror; he felt it as a play of life, life like his own, on all things; it gave comfort and strength now, as well as awe.

"The surface of the universal earth," worked, "like a sea" "with triumph and delight, with hope and fear."

All experience remained natural; only more and more it became suffused with a purer essence, transfigured by a higher light. The most normally sociable of boys, he began to feel—

> "The self-sufficing power of Solitude."

The feeling of, and belief in, Nature's personality or quasi-personality became both deeper and stronger before Wordsworth left the vale of Esthwaite. Hitherto Nature had been "intervenient" and "secondary;" a time came when she was sought "for her own sake." But the very importance of this change made it all the harder to express clearly. In trying to express it, Wordsworth had to become a "metaphysical" poet in very truth, and to use language which suggests that idealistic philosophy which was growing up contemporaneously in Germany. If it was hard for the poet to express his experience, it is equally hard for the reader to put it into any other words. What Wordsworth learned about Nature in his school days came by way of *feeling* rather than thought; and one can only suggest, adumbrate, what one feels. But his philosophy seems to resolve itself into something like the following:—Nature is subjective as well as objective, internal as well as external: what we call the soul in us has a counterpart in Nature. Or we may put it otherwise, and say that Nature is a display of spirit, to which our individual spirits contribute something. The result of all this action or intercourse, or whatever it may be called, is a pleasurable or even rapturous sense of correspondence or fitness, the mutual recognition, as it were, of parts in a whole. This delightful

or awe-inspiring sense of fitness between the mind and the "external" world—a correspondence testifying to the unity of Nature—is a cardinal part of Wordsworth's poetic philosophy. He felt, when he was ten years old, what, in retrospect, he could describe as—

> "Those hallowed and pure motions of the sense
> Which seem, in their simplicity, to own
> An intellectual charm; that calm delight
> Which, if I err not, surely must belong
> To those first-born affinities that fit
> Our new existence to existing things,
> And, in our dawn of being, constitute
> The bond of union between life and joy."

Already, as a mere happy and ordinary schoolboy, he was dimly recognizing himself as bound by a kind of marriage tie to the world of men and things, and beginning to find warrant for his greatest verse to come.

> "For the discerning intellect of Man,
> When wedded to this goodly universe
> In love and holy passion,"

is to be able to regain the lost Paradise.

> "I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
> Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse
> Of this great consummation:—And, by words
> Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
> Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
> Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
> To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
> How exquisitely the individual Mind
> . . . . . .
> . . . . to the External World
> Is fitted:—and how exquisitely, too—
> Theme this but little heard of among men—
> The external world is fitted to the Mind:
> And the creation (by no lower name
> Can it be called) which they with blended might
> Accomplish:—this is our high argument."

In all this mere feeling was continually passing into intelligence, and every kind of knowledge became a source of poetry. Society was to him "as sweet as solitude" by—

"Gentle agitations of the mind
From manifold distinctions, difference
Perceived in things, where, to the unwatchful eye,
No difference is."

If this language has the unintelligible quality which inevitably belongs to mysticism, it has also an intense reality; it expresses the kind of life-long conviction which makes religions and supports martyrs. Wordsworth himself recognized these boyish experiences as religious; he used about them words specially belonging to the vocabulary of religion; he spoke of "holy" calm, of communion, of faith. Nor was his sense of the "creative" function of his own "imagination," his conviction that some of what he worshipped in Nature came from within himself, less definite than it was bold.

"An auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,
The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on
Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
A like dominion, and the midnight storm
Grew darker in the presence of my eye:
Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
And hence my transport."

The influence of Hawkshead and the vale of Esthwaite did not stop with Wordsworth's school days. He came back in summer vacations during his Cambridge time. He saw again—

"The snow-white church * upon the hill
Sit like a thronéd Lady."

He went to see the dear old dame with whom he had lodged in the little town; the terrier was still there to join him in his walks. Human sympathies which he had not felt before were now astir within him; not only the lake and the hills, the sky, the fields, and the groves, but the peasant folk now drew forth his love. He began to embrace humanity in his conception of Nature. His outlook became more altruistic; a "joy in widest commonalty spread," rather than an individual luxury. Yet it by no means lost its vague mystical grandeur, its unspeakable incommunicable privacy.

* It was then a whitewashed building.

"When first I made
Once more the circuit of our little lake,
If ever happiness hath lodged with man,
That day consummate happiness was mine,
Wide-spreading, steady, calm, contemplative.
The sun was set, or setting, when I left
Our cottage door, and evening soon brought on
A sober hour, not winning or serene,
For cold and raw the air was, and untuned:
But as a face we love is sweetest then
When sorrow damps it, or, whatever look
It chance to wear, is sweetest if the heart
Have fulness in herself; even so with me
It fared that evening. Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and self-transmuted stood
Naked, as in the presence of her God."

One little scene marks a kind of climax of this phase of the poet's experience. During these vacation days the young man was far from being wholly satisfied with himself; what he looked back upon as frivolity and triviality mixed with the high delights of a poetic soul. Ordinary social pleasures—dancing, games, and the rest of it—came to "depress zeal" and "damp yearnings." He felt himself growing weaker instead of stronger; his very garments seemed to prey on his strength. Nor did social amusements make him unselfish; on the contrary, they—

"Stopped the quiet stream
Of self-forgetfulness."

Yet out of one time which the poet's austerity might have condemned as specially wasteful in its frivolity, came an act of decisive dedication to the unseen and eternal. Somewhere (not far from Hawkshead, and not far from a view-point over the sea) the young Wordsworth had been at a late and long dance.

"'Mid a throng
Of maids and youths, old men, and matrons staid
A medley of all tempers, I had passed
The night in dancing, gaiety, and mirth,
With din of instruments and shuffling feet,
And glancing forms, and tapers glittering,
And unaimed prattle flying up and down;
Spirits upon the stretch, and here and there
Slight shocks of young love-liking interspersed,
Whose transient pleasure mounted to the head,
And tingled through the veins."

Then came the end of the ball, and the untimely passing out into the quiet of the early morning. It was after cockcrow; the east was alive. As the youth walked home the sun rose; the sea laughed in the distance; the mountains were as "bright as the clouds." A more ordinary mind than Wordsworth's would have halted on the commonplace contrast between the scenes inside and outside the ballroom, between the tired spirit of the night sinking back among extinguished lights and exhausted fripperies, and the glorious young day, leaping up like a giant refreshed with wine. A more conventional moralist would have vexed himself that the night had hindered him from the best enjoyment of the day. It was otherwise with Wordsworth. To the high mood of that morning the night contributed as much as the day. There was nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to regret. The night and the morning made up one great experience, one moment of destiny. It was the *accolade* of the knightly poet.

> "To the brim
> My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
> Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
> Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly
> A dedicated Spirit."

So much had come of the schooltime among the mountains and the lakes. And it was their work. They had made their poet.

CHAPTER III

THE WEST COUNTRY

AMONG the pleasant English shires none is pleasanter, none richer, than Somerset. Nor is there any more various or more fertile in surprises. Hill, plain, and sea "bear each an orchestral part" in the general character and effect. In the north-west the county is flat plain, bounded by the Bristol Channel. Beyond wide expanses, relieved from dulness by cheerful apple-orchards, you guess rather than see the gleaming streaks of sand and silver; you may be aware of a hazy sail on the horizon; if the air is clear, you will see, from miles inland, the irregular outlines of Steepholm and Flatholm, the rocky islets that stand at the outlet of Severn Sea; and at night, as you look from any high ground, the sky will be reddened by the glare of the furnaces of South Wales.

Bridgwater, with its long streets, its fine church and its busy markets, stands on the little river Parret, which sinks sluggishly north-westward from the Jurassic uplands near Yeovil and the Dorset border. Its course is through marshy alluvium; and a poor muddy concern it looks at Bridgwater, though the tide is plainly felt there, and good-sized vessels are in the ooze on either side of the bridge, waiting for high water. But, on the whole, the town is beyond the flats through which the traveller's course from Bristol has lain, beyond the cornfields and orchards of the present, the pathless wastes of Alfred's and even of Monmouth's days. West of it the ground rises into pleasant fertile upland of New Red Sandstone, to merge, a few miles further on, in the much older Devonian strata, which stretch, with only one small interruption, across Exmoor to the Atlantic shore.

The high ground in which the Parret rises forms the

boundary between Somerset and Dorset, and, to the westward, makes a background for the scenery of eastern Devon. The whole region, dividing the Bristol from the English Channel, is the heart of the "west country," a land of cider and the letter "z"; soft and moist in climate; abounding in orchards; its peasantry without the shrewdness of the north, but rich in qualities of the heart, due, perhaps, to the Celtic strain; gracious, neighbourly, civil folk, with a kindly greeting for the stranger, but with a deep local patriotism. Remote and primitive the west country remains, even in these days; perhaps, in a sense, even more so, in spite of railways, than it was when Wordsworth and Coleridge made it a land of the Muses.

For, as a glance at the map shows, it is the natural playground and rural outlet and refuge of Bristol; and Bristol, a century since, was relatively a more important place than it is now. It was still the second city in the kingdom, the counterpart in the west of London in the east; for in those days the industrial importance of the north had hardly arisen: the greatness of Manchester, the greatness of Liverpool, lay in the future, though a future close at hand. Moreover, was not Bath close to Bristol—Bath with its pump-room and its waters, the chief cynosure of eighteenth-century fashionable idleness and mild invalidism? And had not Bristol its own "hot-wells," whereof we read in *Humphrey Clinker* and *Evelina*, to which humbler people resorted?

Among the personalities who adorn the annals of the great Atlantic port in the eighteenth century, a few stand out conspicuous. One was Edward Colston (whom the annual "Colston banquets" commemorate to this day), the philanthropic West India merchant who represented the city in Parliament in the last days of Queen Anne's reign and did so much for Bristol's highest good. A more famous representative was Edmund Burke, who, though an outsider, was elected for Bristol in 1774, and sat for the city until 1780. It was as member for Bristol that Burke made his great speeches on the American question; and it was to the Sheriffs of Bristol that he wrote, in 1777, a letter almost as great, in which he laid claim to the full sympathy of the citizens, and paid them a compliment of which they might well be proud. "By the favour of my fellow-citizens," he wrote, "I am the representative of an

honest, well-ordered, virtuous city; of a people who preserve more of the original English simplicity and purity of manners than perhaps any other. You possess among you several men and magistrates of large and cultivated understandings; fit for any employment in any sphere." Yet this eminent constituency was on the eve of quarrelling with Burke, and, a little later, spurning him altogether. In 1778, the selfishness of the Bristol merchants made them oppose Burke's noble efforts for the liberation of Irish industry; the city was in a state of such "miserable distraction," that Burke, knowing that defeat was certain, refused to submit himself to its suffrages, and humbly and respectfully, and for ever, took his leave of the sheriffs, the candidates, and the electors. This time it was the Protestantism of Bristol which resented Burke's support of the mitigation of Roman Catholic disabilities.

Burke's chief friend and correspondent in his Bristol constituency was Richard Champion, the inventor of the famous "Bristol China." Hannah More, the "improver" of so many occasions, and a larger figure, perhaps, in English life than we realize, lived and worked close to Bristol.

To the lover of literature, however, more interesting than any of those names are certain comparatively obscure inhabitants, whose fortunes were linked with the fortunes of English poetry at a great crisis of its history. There was, for instance, Joseph Cottle the bookseller and publisher, whose enterprise and literary sympathy helped the genius of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey forth into the outer air. Of him we shall hear again. Not so eminent as Cottle was another Bristol man named Robert Southey, a countryman of West Somerset by birth, who became a linen-draper in the great town, with a hare for his shop sign, and the father of a younger Robert Southey, destined to fame.

Neither Southey the elder nor his wife was interesting; but the young Robert had an ambitious aunt who insisted on the boy's being sent to school at Westminster, and after that to Balliol College, Oxford. Even at school Southey had been drinking at the sources of Romanticism, and his head was full of Rousseau when he went up to Balliol in 1792. His sympathies were as revolutionary as Wordsworth's, and Gibbon had taught him to be a sceptic in religion. Instead of "minding his books,"

as the authorities expected him to do, he planned epic poems; and meditated, with kindred enthusiasts, emigration to virgin soil in America, and the plantation of a republican settlement there, where perfect social equality might be realized without the lurid horrors that were spoiling the French Revolution. One day in the summer term of 1794, there appeared in Oxford and in Southey's rooms a young man from Southey's west country though not from Bristol. He was a strange-looking youth, with masses of long black hair parted Miltonically in the middle, and so emphasizing the expanse of a noble brow; open, luminous grey eyes; and a curiously large mouth, which, with its parted lips, looked weak in repose, but which, when it became the agent of the intelligence bespoken by brow and eye, uttered speech even then unparalleled in its radiant fulness. It was Samuel Taylor Coleridge, younger son of the quaint pedantic vicar of Ottery St. Mary in Devon, who was still an undergraduate at Jesus College, Cambridge, but had run away and enlisted in the King's Dragoons, from which escapade he had been some months returned. Coleridge had a companion with him with whom he was on his way to begin a walking-tour in Wales; and they had an introduction to Southey. A young man who would run away from Cambridge to enlist; a young man of rare originality, full of enthusiasm, and copious of speech, was the sort likely to fall in with Southey's American dream, and so it proved. They left Oxford together; and, when Coleridge's Welsh tour was over, he came to Bristol, and he and Southey walked about Somersetshire, and talked their scheme of Rousseauish Transatlantic equality — "Pantisocracy," the rule of all and sundry, was to be its name—into definite shape. The shape was very definite indeed. Twelve gentlemen symmetrically matched with twelve ladies were to embark for America in the following spring. They were to plant themselves on a delightful spot in the "back settlements"; each gentleman was to provide £125, to work two or three hours a day, to hold any political or religious opinions he liked, and to be free to quit the Commonwealth at any time. The produce of the labour was to be held communistically, and there were to be plenty of books for the improvement of the ample leisure. The twelve ladies were a little difficult to dispose of. The arrangements contemplated were not "Platonic," in the popular

sense of that word ; for the education of children was carefully provided for. Apparently it was left undecided whether and how matrimonial plans were to be made on a communistic basis. Such ideas grew out of the west country in those days.

A practical step towards the realization of Pantisocracy was the engagement of Southey and Coleridge respectively to two sisters, Edith and Sarah Fricker, daughters of a Bristol merchant. There was a third daughter, Mary Fricker; and she was paired off with a third Pantisocrat, Robert Lovell, the son of another Bristol tradesman, a Quaker, who joined Southey in his first volume of verse, and died a year or two after. The community were to start in April, 1795 ; that had been settled during autumn walks in pleasant Somerset and conferences at Southey's aunt's house at Bristol ; but when April came, nobody was ready to start. Coleridge had gone to Cambridge to take his degree, and then to London to write sonnets in the *Morning Chronicle.* During this time he seemed to forget all about Pantisocracy and Sarah Fricker. In January, Southey dug him out of London and carried him back to Bristol, where his interest in both revived. Southey and he lived together, and with them was another young Pantisocrat, Robert Burnett, son of a Somerset farmer. Cottle, the bookseller, was very amiable and helpful, and there were all sorts of literary and other plans. But the *minimum* £125 necessary from each gentleman of the twelve—and where were the twelve?—was not forthcoming ; and so, when April arrived, no start was made ; and, as the year 1795 grew older, it became evident that no start ever would be made. At close quarters, Southey found Coleridge's wonderful talk a trifle fatiguing ; the Pantisocrats had difficulty in paying even for their Bristol lodgings ; and at last Southey went off to Bath disillusioned as to Pantisocracy, and resolved to follow conventional courses. Poor Coleridge was left lamenting and grumbling at Bristol. Matrimony was the only solid result of the Pantisocratic negotiations. Before the year was out, Sarah Fricker had become Mrs. Coleridge, and Edith Fricker Mrs. Southey, in St. Mary Redcliffe's Church.

While Coleridge and Southey were "digging," as modern Oxonians say, together in those summer days at Bristol, what was Wordsworth doing? Wordsworth knew nothing of Coleridge or of Southey ; but he too—so Destiny would have it

—was coming to Bristol and the West country. He had gone straight from Hawkshead to Cambridge in 1787, where he passed through the usual course at St. John's College. The University did little that was definitely formative for Wordsworth; it sheltered his growth and supplied his meditative imagination with some themes; but neither its prescribed studies nor its friendships counted for much in his life. He learned more in vacation rambles; immeasurably more in London, and on his second and fateful visit to France in 1791–2. For Wordsworth the years between 1792 and 1796 were very critical. He had been away from Cambridge more than four years; he had had his stimulating and disturbing time in France; he was face to face with the imperious necessities of bread and butter. He intended, indeed, to be a poet; but the amount of bread and butter which can be made out of poetry such as *An Evening Walk* or *Descriptive Sketches* cannot be very satisfying in any conceivable condition of appetite, either for poetry or for bread and butter. It would have been natural to take Orders, as his brother Christopher afterwards did; but he did not hear the call, without which he was too conscientious to dare to take such a step. In fact, in those days, though far from the Unitarianism of Coleridge, the Deism, or whatever it may have been, of Southey, though he could never, probably, have been turned into a Pantisocrat, Wordsworth was much of a rebel; he was ashamed of his country, or at least of the Government of it; he felt as if his spiritual beliefs were built on the sand. For a time he steadied himself on what the Revolutionists called "Reason," conceived as intelligence acting without disturbance by feeling. Pleasing himself with no childish Utopias such as filled the dreams of Southey and Coleridge, he tried to construct abstract social ideals. He began by *anatomizing the frame of social life*, to use his own phrase; he questioned and cross-questioned everything, expecting that everything would prove itself; and finding that nothing would, he—

"Yielded up moral questions in despair."

A man in this frame of mind is not fit to take Orders; nor is he very fit to succeed in anything, unless, indeed, he can identify himself wholly with activities that are entirely practical; and Wordsworth wanted to be a poet!

He took refuge in walking-tours and looked out for tutorships. In one of the walking-tours, in 1793, he visited the Wye; and, if we may trust his account of his mood written five years later, he was still quick with the passionate feeling for Nature which had marked his boyhood. He sang in 1798—

> "I cannot paint
> What then I was. The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite."

In the course of this same expedition he went up the Wye to Goodrich, where, in the courtyard of the castle, he met the "little cottage-girl," whose "beauty made him glad," with whom he chatted, and about whom, in the *annus mirabilis*, 1798, he was to have the lovely afterthought which we know as *We are Seven*. 1794 was the same loose, desultory kind of year, made up of walking-tours, a little teaching, some poetizing and much meditating, while the future was as uncertain as ever. The deepest cause of the unrest and purposelessness, we may be sure, was the "despair" in which he had "yielded up moral questions." While relations and friends saw only want of openings and slackness of energy, while his sister Dorothy was concerned only about William's want of employment, William was wholly preoccupied with the evolution of the French drama; he could not dissociate from it that English individuality of his which called out for a career, or at least an income.

Part of the scepticism which was numbing him came, not from any infection of French atheism, but from loss of faith in the revolutionary movement. The first jar had been given to his nature by the hostility of England to France: soon he was jarred again by the insolent aggressiveness of the French arms. He had rapid fluctuations of feeling. One summer day, in 1794, he was walking across the sands which, at low water, make firm footing beyond the mouth of the Leven, between Ulverston and Grange. The sands and shallow waters of the estuary were alive with pleasure-seekers, with guides to keep them from treacherous places; overhead was the plenitude of summer light in serenest weather. Wordsworth was near the

scenes of his childhood, and the luxury of pensive reminiscence came on him. In the morning he had stood by the grave of his Hawkshead schoolmaster, William Taylor, in Cartmell churchyard; and he reflected with how much pleasure Taylor would have greeted his old pupil as a poet. Suddenly, and by a strange hap, the vast issues of the great world broke in on the sweet egoistic trance. The pedestrian was close to the pleasure-seekers when he heard one of them say, *Robespierre is dead!* At the shock of this news Wordsworth's faith in Providence felt strong once more; and as he walked along he hailed, in not very good blank verse, the coming of "golden times," in which the Revolution, purged of the Terror, would—

> "March firmly towards righteousness and peace."

And so "interrupted by uneasy bursts of exultation," he went on his way.

During the months in which Southey and Coleridge were planning their Pantisocracy in the west country, Wordsworth was much among the Lakes. It was good for him to be there; for nothing, save one other thing, was so restorative to his soul as the northern Paradise. And now that other thing also was his; for now he had the frequent, almost constant, companionship of Dorothy. Since the break-up of the Cockermouth home, she had lived, partly with her cousins, the Rawsons, near Halifax, and much with her mother's brother Canon Cookson at Windsor, and at his living of Forncett in Norfolk. The dream of her life was to live with William. When he was restored to her, after Cambridge and France, she delighted in him as much as she had done when they were children. At the Christmas of 1792 they were together at Forncett, and tasted the joy of a perfect companionship of the kind which only brothers and sisters may know. "I cannot describe," she wrote, "his attention to me. There was no pleasure that he would not have given up with joy for half an hour's conversation with me. Every day, as soon as we rose from dinner, we used to pace the gravel walk in the garden till six o'clock. Nothing but rain or snow prevented our taking this walk. Often have I gone out, when the keenest north wind has been whistling amongst the trees over our head, and have paced that walk in the garden, which will always be dear to me—from the remembrance of

those very long conversations I have had upon it supported by my brother's arm. Ah! I never thought of the cold when he was with me. I am as heretical as yourself in my opinions concerning love and friendship. I am very sure that love will never bind me closer to any human being than friendship binds me . . . to William, my earliest and my dearest male friend."

During the next two years she was much his companion, often in long walking-tours. In the spring of 1794—some months before William heard of Robespierre's death on Ulverston sands—they made a great tour in the Lake-country, taking walks of portentous length for a girl, reviving childish impressions, and adding to them. They paused near Keswick to pay a visit to the Calverts at Windybrow, a farmhouse close to the town. The Calverts were cultivated, simple people, fond of reading, and loving their cottage better than any of the "showy edifices" in the neighbourhood. The head of the family was land-agent to the Duke of Norfolk. The Wordsworths were "paying guests," and had their own sitting-room. With one of the brothers, William Calvert, Wordsworth had been in the Isle of Wight when the guns boomed hostility to France across Spithead; and there was another, Raisley, who seemed to be falling into consumption, and whose condition gave Wordsworth great anxiety at this time. Those spring days were very happy; besides the Calverts at Windybrow, there were the Speddings at Armathwaite, who were to give an eminent son to literature in the coming century. There were wonderful views from the windows; and the Wordsworths cultivated happiness on an Irish diet of milk and potatoes.

Even milk and potatoes cost something, and one cannot live upon views. Wordsworth was thinking of what we now call journalism as a possible means of livelihood. Twelve years after the death of Samuel Johnson, journalism was very far from being what it is now; but the great man had fairly launched it, and a great and permanent career lay before it. Journalism, the art of the periodical, when it is not mere gossip, means two things in chief, literary criticism and political comment, and, in the last decade of the eighteenth century, it was a very springtide for both in Britain. For were these not the days of the Romantic Revival, the Renascence of Wonder, in literature; and did not the air, from end to end of the island, hum and

buzz with revolutionary ideas, social theories, and the noise of Pitt-and-Fox-ite controversy? The number of periodicals was still small, and none was perhaps very influential. The natural course for a clever and energetic young man still was to do what Steele and Johnson had done, and start a new one if he had enough money and good auspices; and, with or without co-adjutors, to make it the vehicle of his thought. Among Wordsworth's Cambridge friends was a certain James Mathews who was pushing his fortune in literary London; and the two thought that they might together start a monthly "miscellany." It was to be called *The Philanthropist*, and to be "republican" without being "revolutionary." Wordsworth, in the true eighteenth-century style, was to "communicate critical remarks on poetry, the arts of painting, gardening, etc., besides essays on morals and politics." But neither Wordsworth nor Mathews was a Steele or an Addison; and *The Philanthropist* never got beyond the projectors' brains. Should Wordsworth go up to town and try to get work on some daily newspaper? An Opposition paper it must, of course be; Wordsworth's French sympathies might be shaken, but he was as averse as ever from Pitt's war against France. He consulted Mathews about this; but there is no evidence that Mathews encouraged. Meanwhile something happened.

Through the winter of 1794–5 William and Dorothy Wordsworth were mostly in the Lake country and much at Windybrow. In those months Raisley Calvert was dying, and Wordsworth spent much of his time by his bedside. Early in 1795 he died; and it was found that he had left £900 to Wordsworth. It was not much; but it seemed enough to be a poet upon, and it was enough to make Wordsworth give up thoughts of journalism for ever. Eleven years later he wrote a sonnet about this crisis in his life, which reveals to us the very essence of the man.

> "Calvert! it must not be unheard by them
> Who may respect my name, that I to thee
> Owed many years of early liberty.
> This care was thine when sickness did condemn
> Thy youth to hopeless wasting, root and stem—
> That I, if frugal and severe, might stray
> Where'er I liked; and finally array
> My temples with the Muse's diadem.

Hence, if in freedom I have loved the truth ;
If there be aught of pure, or good, or great,
In my past verse ; or shall be, in the lays
Of higher mood, which now I meditate ;—
It gladdens me, O worthy, short-lived Youth !
To think how much of this will be thy praise."

To be "frugal and severe," and "finally" to win "the Muse's diadem": such was Wordsworth's life, and such its reward.

Now at last, then, Dorothy's dream could come true, and she and William could begin their joint-life in a more complete home than farmhouse lodgings could supply. But where, in the length and breadth of England ?

Basil Montagu, who was to become eminent at the Bar and as editor of Bacon, was just Wordsworth's age, and had been at Cambridge with him. He was now in chambers in London, a married man, though not yet called to the Bar. Montagu had a friend at Bristol, a merchant named Pinney, and Pinney had a country-house in Dorset called Racedown Lodge, among the big hills between Crewkerne and Lyme Regis. In the summer of 1795 Wordsworth, looking out for something to help the interest of Raisley Calvert's legacy, consulted Basil Montagu, probably face to face in London. Pinney, of Bristol and Racedown, had a boy of thirteen ; and, on Montagu's advice and with his introduction, Wordsworth went to Bristol to stay with Pinney, possibly as tutor to the boy, certainly to discuss plans with the merchant. The result was the construction of a delightful scheme for the Wordsworths. Pinney was to let them have Racedown Lodge rent-free, on condition that the eldest son of the family should have right of entry and residence for a few weeks each year. Basil Montagu had a son also called Basil, whom he was to board with the Wordsworths at Racedown ; and there was to be a little girl besides, of three and a half (a relation of the Wordsworths'), whom Dorothy was to look after. Such was the projected settlement of 1795 which grew out of Raisley Calvert's bequest and Basil Montagu's friendship.

Early in September Dorothy wrote all about it to a friend, and told gleefully how they were to live on £70 or £80 from all sources, and how she was to join William at Bristol,

and drive with him fifty miles in a chaise to Racedown. To Racedown, accordingly, the brother and sister went, and there they remained for the better part of two years, till July, 1797. They were settling in there, when Coleridge—Pantisocracy having come to grief—was married at St. Mary Redcliffe's, and spending his honeymoon in a tiny cottage at Clevedon; and they had been settled some time when Southey, also newly married, set out, without his wife, to spend the winter in Portuguese sunshine and among the lemon groves and cork-trees of Cintra.

Two wonderful years at Racedown!—not so much because of the poetry Wordsworth wrote there, though that was not without significance, as because of the history of his soul. For we cannot, surely, be wrong in attributing to those years the chief part of that process of recovery of which Wordsworth has told us so much, that recovery from the shocks of revolution, that restoration of admiration, faith, and love, chastened by the knowledge of man at his worst, which is the key to his character and his work. And we certainly need be in no doubt as to the chief agency by which the recovery was brought about.

The companionship of the brother and sister, enjoyed intermittently during long walks in the Lake country and pleasant days in the Calverts' house at Windybrow, was now continuous. For the first time in her life Dorothy felt *at home;* her eager, passionate love of Nature was fed by the beautiful upland scenery of Dorset and the Devon border, the bold heights, golden with broom and furze, and swept by sea-winds; and she had William always with her. They lived a life of perfect simplicity, reading and writing indoors, walking and gardening without. Their means were straiter than they had expected, for, somehow, little Basil Montagu was their only resident charge. But he was a great delight to them. They left him to Nature's leading, with a little gentle human discipline superadded. In the first winter, a certain Mary Hutchinson, with whom William had played at Penrith, paid them a visit. Perhaps this was the "nearer view" of his old playmate, of which he was to sing—

> "I saw her upon nearer view,
> A Spirit, yet a Woman too!
> Her household motions light and free,
> And steps of virgin-liberty;

A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet;
A Creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles."

Anyhow, Dorothy wrote that they were "as happy as human beings can be, that is, when William is at home; for you cannot imagine how dull we feel when he is away. . . . He is the life of the whole house." These pleasant things make the outside picture. But it is the inner life at Racedown of which they are the index, which chiefly interests us. Wordsworth himself has admitted us into the inner shrine in that autobiography, so veracious and yet so imaginative, so modest and yet so lofty in its modesty, which we know as *The Prelude*. The last four books of *The Prelude* tell us how the disillusioned Revolutionist was brought to that culmination of his genius—that region of central calm from which his greatest influence came. He tells us how, when he could bear the torment of moral problems no longer, he found a momentary refuge in mathematics, in science so abstract as to appeal to the reasoning faculties alone. Then it was that his sister saved him by showing him his true self, by assuring him that his true self was clouded, but not injured. She reminded him of the high prerogative of a poet, who controls and transfigures circumstance, and is not mastered by it.

"She whispered still that brightness would return,
She, in the midst of all, preserved me still
A Poet."

Nor did Dorothy help her brother only by a ministry which might harden as well as strengthen his self-reliance. She softened and sweetened him as only a woman's influence can soften and sweeten a man.

"But for thee, dear Friend!
My soul, too reckless of mild grace, had stood
In her original self too confident,
Retained too long a countenance severe;
A rock with torrents roaring, with the clouds
Familiar, and a favourite of the stars:
But thou didst plant its crevices with flowers,
Hang it with shrubs that twinkle in the breeze,
And teach the little birds to build their nests
And warble in its chambers."

Yet, in Wordsworth's case, no human affection, no human being could be more than an "under-agent" in such great operations. Dorothy could take her brother to Nature, could show him Nature; but it was Nature alone who could do the whole work. Nature was only "assisted" by "all varieties of human love." It was Nature only, the "Being that is in the clouds and air," *the Presence that disturbs with the joy of elevated thoughts*, that could heal, in a nature like Wordsworth's, the wounds that Man had made. And it was only after he had been healed that he could understand or love Man again.

It is not easy, otherwise than by quotation, to set forth the communion which Wordsworth claimed with Nature. Yet in the books of *The Prelude* referred to above and again and again, if more briefly, elsewhere, he expresses himself on the subject with great fulness. Perhaps the central passage of all is that marvellous conclusion of the fourth book of *The Excursion*—"Despondency Corrected," in which the Wanderer, who stands for Wordsworth healed and restored, exhorts the Solitary, who may be taken to represent Wordsworth jarred and wounded. The passage is the more relevant that part of it was written in the west country, while Wordsworth was living with his sister there. It is easy to quote: may one venture to paraphrase?

Men, Wordsworth seems to mean, were intended to possess a peace which passes all understanding, and of which they ought not to be deprived. They can possess it by virtue of a faculty of *imagination;* which, whatever it means besides and elsewhere in Wordsworth, here means a combination of the reason and the affections, by which men lay hold of the central fact of the universe, which is Love, Truth, and Beauty. In doing this, they are undaunted by the evil and adversity which are so prominent; or, rather, imagination (which may also be called faith) sees these hindrances in a light which deprives them of their terrors. This use of the imagination is more than half moral (Wordsworth uses the striking phrase "imaginative Will"), and it may be described as "Admiration, Hope, and Love." The climax of its achievement is to find Love as the active and dominant principle of things; and to recognize through Love the kinship of man with man.

And now, what part is played by Nature, in the sense of the

various phenomena of the open air, in this wholesome exercise of human faculty? How are men helped to such transcendent metaphysical results by dayspring, moonshine, and the solemnities of starlight; by smiling flower and waving tree, by the voices of lambs in the meadow, or the wheel of the eagle about some lonely peak? Wordsworth answers that all these things teach the mind through the affections; that they touch the affections easily and naturally because they exclude the jarring human problems; and that the gentler and quieter they are, the more likely they are to do so. When the charm of Nature has been shed abroad in a man, then he is prepared to face even the hardest human problems with the serenity of love. In Wordsworth's own words, written probably at Racedown—

> "For the Man who . . . communes with the Forms
> Of nature, who with understanding heart
> Both knows and loves such objects as excite
> No morbid passions, no disquietude,
> No vengeance and no hatred—needs must feel
> The joy of that pure principle of love
> So deeply, that, unsatisfied with aught
> Less pure and exquisite, he cannot choose
> But seek for objects of a kindred love
> In fellow-natures and a kindred joy.
> Accordingly he by degrees perceives
> His feelings of aversion softened down;
> A holy tenderness pervade his frame,
> His sanity of reason not impaired,
> Say rather, all his thoughts now flowing clear,
> From a clear fountain flowing, he looks round
> And seeks for good; and finds the good he seeks;
> Until abhorrence and contempt are things
> He only knows by name; and, if he hear
> From other mouths, the language which they speak,
> He is compassionate, and has no thought,
> No feeling, which can overcome his love."

Nor is this all: Nature is not only a refuge and a teacher; she is a symbolic system; and from her phenomena, her laws, we may and ought to learn the laws of human obligation. "So build we up," he concludes—

> "The Being that we are;
> Thus deeply drinking-in the soul of things,
> We shall be wise perforce. . . . Whate'er we see

> Or feel, shall tend to quicken and refine ;
> Shall fix, in calmer seats of moral strength
> Earthly desires ; and raise, to loftier heights
> Of divine love, our intellectual soul."

The time at Racedown was not very productive. Wordsworth was learning rather than teaching ; he was gaining his life's poise, and his poetic efforts were tentative. He tried his hand at translating Juvenal ; he worked hard at that most undramatic of dramas, *The Borderers*, which hardly the most enthusiastic Wordsworthian now reads, but which the greatest critic of his age spoke of as "absolutely wonderful," and which, he seemed to imply, put Wordsworth above Shakespeare in knowledge of the heart. One essay, however, he made of lasting importance. As he walked about Dorset he heard the story of desertion, the story of the ruined cottage and Margaret, which forms the second half of the first book of *The Excursion ;* and all that story he wrote there, with one or two other passages afterwards to form part of the same long poem.

In 1796 the three remarkable inhabitants of the west country, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, were to meet, with consequences momentous to English literature. Coleridge, in the first year of his married life, was fussily busy and ambulatory, but essentially unhappy and desultory. His headquarters were at Redcliffe Hill, close to Bristol. He was writing and publishing poetry ; but his chief occupation was trying to start a periodical somewhat on the lines of Wordsworth's abortive *Philanthropist.* It was to be called *The Watchman.* Coleridge wandered over England in the early months of 1796 in search of subscribers, preaching in Unitarian chapels on the Sundays. Of course *The Watchman* soon dropped into *limbo ;* and so did scheme after scheme of this unhappy young man. His wife kept going such home as he had at Bristol ; and there, this same year, his eldest son, David Hartley, was born.

Southey returned from Portugal to Bristol and his wife in May of this year, intending to leave his Edith no more, and to prepare for the dogged pursuit of law in the winter. His relations with Coleridge were still rather strained, though there was no open quarrel ; and they were often together. Somehow, Wordsworth got to know of the "two extraordinary youths," as

he called them, and went to see them at Bristol. There is no evidence that the acquaintance with Southey went much further at this stage; but the Wordsworths took greatly to Coleridge, and there were several interchanges of visits between Racedown and Bristol. The Wordsworths never forgot the way in which Coleridge at Racedown leapt a fence and came across a field instead of walking on the highroad. Dorothy was immensely interested in the new friend, in his talk, and his good temper. She thought him plain: he was tall and thin, and it was hard to get over the wide mouth with its indifferent teeth; but when the gray eyes lighted up!—it was indeed a "fine frenzy" that one saw in them. There was evidently a rushing together of spirits here from which great things might come.

In 1797 the Wordsworths left breezy Racedown, and came into Somerset to be near the Coleridges. When you pass out of Bridgwater to continue the journey westward, you are soon among pleasant new red sandstone uplands well supplied with the characteristic features of English scenery, villages, country seats, comfortable farmsteads. In front, growing into greater clearness as your wheels or horses' feet bear you onwards, is the long line of hills which you are told are the Quantocks, not high, except here and there, and showing much woodland and many folds and creases when you are near enough to make them out. Some miles from Bridgwater you pause on a summit, for the Quantocks are near enough to be scrutinized, and between you and them there is a breadth of low country with a tall church tower, and near, but not close to it, a village of some size. It is Nether Stowey; and in a few minutes more you are in the gently climbing street with the market-cross, and the runlet of water by the side of the roadway. Making still for the Quantocks, you pause again by the last house on the left-hand side of the street. For there is a tablet let into the wall which tells the world that Samuel Taylor Coleridge lived here.

Coleridge drifted to Nether Stowey with his wife and baby Hartley at the Christmastide of 1796–7. What brought him there?

At Nether Stowey lived in those days a certain Thomas Poole, one of the west-country folk on whose modest shoulders Providence laid some of the weight of the literary destinies

of England. Poole was only a tanner by trade; but circumstances and kindness of heart made him a kind of Maecenas or Monckton Milnes in his place and day. His people were of Somerset for generations; and Tom Poole's tanning-business was hereditary. He took to it with much intelligence if not with very hearty liking, and settled down at twenty-five in the substantial house at Nether Stowey as assistant and successor to his father. He was a man of quite remarkable impressionableness and amiability; and, though he had no educational advantages, he soon showed himself an essentially well-educated man, intellectual, well informed, benevolent and just. Unhappily for his social peace, if fortunately for his individual development, his sympathies were with the early French Revolution; and this liberalism greatly disturbed his excellent father, other relations of his, and the conservative notions of Somerset generally. He spent many hours daily in reading; and among his favourite books there were (so it was thought) the works of too many French philosophers. But the French fever passed; and it was not as a revolutionary, but rather as a most law-abiding and religious citizen, that Tom Poole endeared himself at and about Nether Stowey. One influence that may have helped to keep him straight was that of his cousin John Poole, an Oxford man, a Fellow of Oriel, and a clergyman, whose home was near. The two men had much to do with the foundation of a book club at Nether Stowey; and J. Poole of Oriel kept a sharp eye on any work of an "infidel" tendency which his "democratic" cousin might introduce.

In 1794, when Coleridge was twenty-two, Tom Poole was twenty-nine, and still absorbingly interested in social and political questions and reforms. It was the year of Robespierre's death; of Wordsworth's wanderings with his sister; of Coleridge's introduction to Southey at Oxford, and their subsequent negotiations about Pantisocracy at Bristol and in its neighbourhood. In the autumn they, with Lovell and Burnett, were, as we remember, recruiting in the highways and bye-ways of Somerset for the Pantisocratic scheme: what more inevitable than that they should go to Nether Stowey, and what more natural than that they should call on Tom Poole? They did call on him; he was immensely interested; and took them one August day, to see Cousin John, who was much shocked

by the opinions of the young strangers. "Each of them," he records in his Latin diary, "was shamefully hot with Democratic rage as regards politics, and both were Infidel as to religion" (uterque verò rabie Democratica, quoad Politiam; et Infidelis quoad Religionem spectat, turpiter fervet). Tom's point of view was different; and though he lamented over the nature of at least Southey's religion, he described the scheme with much sympathetic detail.

The acquaintance thus made between Coleridge and Poole ripened with time. Poole's intellectual tastes steadily grew, and were fed by wise reading in English, French, and Latin, and the collection of a good library. Poole had an enthusiastic belief in Coleridge and his probable career; and the Poole house at Nether Stowey, with the tanyard behind and the sloping garden, and the eagerly sympathetic Thomas among his books within, became a recognized resort of the wandering S. T. C. On one occasion he took his young wife, and stayed a considerable time. The substantial Poole gave a tangible proof of his friendship by collecting £41 towards the *Watchman* project; and Coleridge replied in words of impassioned gratitude. He himself refused to regard the matter as mere gratitude. "The *strong and unmixed affection*," he wrote, "which I bear to you, seems to exclude all emotions of *gratitude*, and renders even the principle of *esteem* latent and inert. . . . God bless you, my dear, very dear friend."

Towards the close of 1796 Coleridge's desultoriness was a source of real misery to him, and he turned to Nether Stowey and Poole as to a stronghold. Could he but get a house near the village, where he might settle down, write poetry, work in the garden, and perhaps dabble in farming! He certainly needed all that the proximity of Poole's strong character could do for him, for he was neuralgic that autumn; and alas! alas! he tried the effect of drops of laudanum on the pain. He was worried, he was restless. Was there no simple cottage that Poole could recommend? He called at the Bristol post-office daily in search of an encouraging letter from Stowey. At last one came; but it was not very encouraging after all. There was a cottage, Poole wrote, but surely it would hardly do! It was in the street; it was tiny; it was ugly. But its garden was close to Poole's garden; the Coleridges admitted it was not

beautiful, but of course they would take it and try it for a year; they would keep one servant, and Coleridge himself would teach her how to cook.

Dearly as Poole loved Coleridge, he may have, must have, had his doubts about the amount of happiness which this migration of the impecunious *monsieur, madame, et bébé* to within speaking distance would bring to himself and his relatives. All that was unselfish in him also—and how much that was!—rose up to warn Coleridge against such self-burial in a remote village of a young writer who ought to be nearer the centre of things, at Bristol, if not in London. This prudence kindled Coleridge into foolish passion. He wrote in the accents of a thwarted lover, and as if he thought Poole wished him evil. In decency, therefore, the amiable Poole could protest no more; the house was taken, and Coleridge, with his face "monstrously swollen," a sore throat, and rheumatism in head and shoulders, prepared to walk to Stowey, and apparently carried out his plan. Shortly after his wife followed, with a new friend, Charles Lloyd, a young Birmingham banker of poetic gifts and exceedingly shaky nerves, whose acquaintance Coleridge had made on one of his many journeys. On one of the last days of the "departing year," 1796, which Coleridge was immortalizing in song, the singular household entered on occupancy of the cottage by which the traveller pauses for a moment, curiously and reverently. Coleridge "farmed" his one-and-a-half-acre garden, read, wrote, walked, meditated, and associated with Charles Lloyd and the Pooles. Sometimes he did bits of genuine nursing. "You would smile," he writes to a friend, "to see my eye rolling up to the ceiling in a lyric fury, and on my knee baby clothes pinned to warm!"

It was between Nether Stowey and Racedown that the most fateful exchange of visits between Coleridge and Wordsworth took place. For Coleridge, possessing something which might be called a home, felt that he could invite people; and in July, 1797, the Wordsworths came to see him. Having once come to the Quantocks, they had a mind to stay.

CHAPTER IV

"THREE PEOPLE: ONE SOUL"

THE Wordsworths' visit to Nether Stowey, in July, 1797, was a great event. In June, Coleridge had been at Racedown, reading his tragedy, afterwards published as *Remorse* to Wordsworth, and forming his very high opinion of Wordsworth's *Borderers*. So the intercourse had not had time to cool when the return visit was paid. Modest as were the requirements of the poet and his sister, it must have been something of a strain on the Coleridges' accommodation and cookery to have the Wordsworths for a fortnight. True, Charles Lloyd, Coleridge's now constant housemate, was away, at his native Birmingham; but, on the other hand, during part of the visit, there was another guest in the Nether Stowey cottage, a very important guest indeed.

One of the "Blues" with Coleridge at Christ's Hospital was a boy three years his junior, called Charles Lamb, the son of John Lamb, a scrivener, who lived in the Temple and acted as a kind of *factotum* to a Bencher of the Inner Temple, named Samuel Salt. John Lamb had married the daughter of a Hertfordshire yeoman, whose wife was housekeeper at the Plumers' mansion of Blakesware, near Widford. It was thus from humble surroundings and antecedents that Charles Lamb came; and, when he went to Christ's Hospital, in 1782, he went as one of a family of three children (there had been seven), whom his father "found it difficult to maintain and educate without some assistance." He was a timid, reserved boy, with a bad stammer; but full of sensibility and disposed to hero-worship. He has told us how Coleridge seemed to him then, "Logician, metaphysician, bard" in embryo; abnormal, uncouth, even in boyhood, yet, even in boyhood, so fascinating, so wonderful. "How have I

seen the casual passer through the Cloisters stand still, entranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the *speech* and the *garb* of the young Mirandula), to hear thee unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of Jamblichus, or Plotinus (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting Homer in his Greek or Pindar—while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the *inspired charity-boy!*"

The friendship begun at Christ's was prolonged into manhood. There was no Cambridge or Oxford for Lamb; from Christ's Hospital he passed, after a short interval, to the brief tenure of a clerkship in the South Sea House, to be followed by that clerkship in the East India House, which he held for most of his life. Never was there a more constant or contented Londoner than Lamb; his only outlet was to the not-far-distant Herts, where lovers of *Elia* know what he found at "Blakesmoor" (Blakesware), and "Mackery End." But the peripatetic Coleridge, as confirmed a wanderer as Lamb was a stay-at-home, used to turn up in London in his Cambridge vacations, and later; and the two old school-fellows met at the "Salutation and Cat," just opposite Christ's, and spent long evenings together in an atmosphere of tobacco, philosophy, and poetry. The principal colloquies took place in December, 1794, in the winter after Coleridge had first met Southey, and while Southey, at Bristol, was lamenting over Coleridge's absence and indifference both to Pantisocracy and his *fiancée*, Sarah Fricker. Soon after, as we know, Southey carried Coleridge off to the west country; and for a long time he and Lamb never met. Lamb had a love-story to occupy him, a romance which left nothing but a pale sad moonlight on his life and writings. He lived now in Little Queen Street, Holborn, with his disabled father, his mother, and his sister Mary, eleven years older than himself. Would that nothing worse than disappointed love had been his lot!

In the spring of 1796 he began to write to Coleridge letters which are among the most priceless epistolary treasures in the English language, and which, by an astonishing and happy Providence, the casual S.T.C. was led to preserve. Two of those letters in that year convey, the one with a sweet humour, the other with tragic self-restraint, two pieces of dark news. In May Lamb wrote:—"Coleridge, I know not what suffering

scenes you have gone through at Bristol. My life has been somewhat diversified of late. The six weeks that finished last year and began this, your very humble servant spent very agreeably in a madhouse, at Hoxton. I am got somewhat rational now, and don't bite any one. But mad I was." In September there was worse news. Lamb had to write of "the terrible calamities that have fallen on our family. . . . My poor dear, dearest sister, in a fit of insanity, has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a madhouse. . . . God has preserved to me my senses; I eat, and drink, and sleep, and have my judgment, I believe, very sound." Coleridge's reply was singularly noble: let us hear a few sentences of it, lest we should fail to realize the clear depths of a nature in which there was so much foolish admixture. "I look upon you as a man called by sorrow and anguish and a strange desolation of hopes into quietness, and a soul set apart and made peculiar to God; we cannot arrive at any portion of heavenly bliss without in some measure imitating Christ. And they arrive at the largest inheritance who imitate the most difficult parts of His character, and, bowed down and crushed underfoot, cry in fulness of faith, 'Father, Thy will be done.' I wish above measure to have you for a little while here—no visitants shall blow on the nakedness of your feelings—you shall be quiet, and your spirit may be healed. . . . I charge you, my dearest friend, not to dare to encourage gloom or despair—you are a temporary sharer in human miseries that you may be an eternal partaker of the Divine nature. I charge you, if by any means it be possible, come to me."

Lamb's demeanour, in circumstances so awful, was as nearly faultless as that of a human being could be. He rallied and steadied himself; he did not falter in daily duty; he cultivated his marvellous literary gift; he kept his poor alienated sister close to his heart. He wrote very often to Coleridge: they had many literary matters to discuss, for Coleridge had published his first volume of miscellaneous poems in the spring; and Lamb also meant to be a poet. He criticized Coleridge's early efforts with that combination of inwardness and minuteness by virtue of which he stands alone among English literary critics; and though only twenty-one, and so appreciably Coleridge's junior,

he showed, without a trace of priggishness, an unmistakable moral superiority to his drifting and groping friend. What could be better for Coleridge, in the days when he was feverishly reaching his arms towards Nether Stowey and Thomas Poole, than to get a letter beginning thus: "My dearest Friend,—I grieve from my very soul to observe you, in your plans of life, veering about from this hope to the other, and settling nowhere. Is it an untoward fatality (speaking humanly) that does this for you—a stubborn irresistible concurrence of events? or lies the fault, as I fear it does, in your own mind? You seem to be taking up splendid schemes of fortune only to lay them down again; and your fortunes are an *ignis fatuus* that has been conducting you, in thought, from Lancaster Court, Strand, to somewhere near Matlock; then jumping across to Dr. Somebody's, whose son's tutor you were likely to be; and would to God the dancing demon *may* conduct you at last, in peace and comfort, to the 'life and labours of a cottager.'"

Well, in July, 1797, the "life and labours of a cottager" had been six months in progress, and Charles Lamb was in the Bridgwater coach on his way to Nether Stowey to see what they were like, and how Coleridge was getting on. He had a week's holiday from the India House; we can fancy how sweet must have been the summer air and how soothing the fields as he sped to the west country. And Lamb needed stimulus as well as soothing, for his London life was monotonous and lonely. On June 24 he had written: "I see nobody. I sit and read, or walk alone, and hear nothing. I am quite lost to conversation from disuse; and out of the sphere of my little family . . . I see no face that brightens up at my approach." And a little later: "I long, I yearn, with all the longings of a child do I desire to see you—to see the young philosopher, to thank Sara for her last year's invitation in person—to read your tragedy—to read over together our little book—to breathe fresh air—to revive in me vivid images of '*Salutation* Scenery.'"

So Lamb and the Wordsworths met under Coleridge's roof, and happy hours flowed in the meadows and among the coombs of Quantock. One drawback there was. Some kind of slight accident befel Coleridge at the beginning of the visit, and disabled his leg so that he could not form one of the walking-parties. One evening while the rest were out, he sat in his little

garden under a spreading lime—heavy-sweet with blossom it must have been—and put the situation into blank verse.

"Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,
This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost
Beauties and feelings, such as would have been
Most sweet to my remembrance even when age
Had dimmed mine eyes to blindness! They meanwhile,
Friends, whom I nevermore may meet again,
On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,
Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,
To that still roaring dell, of which I told;
The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep,
And only speckled by the mid-day sun;
Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock
Flings arching like a bridge . . .
. . . Now, my friends emerge
Beneath the wide wide Heaven—and view again
The many-steepled tract magnificent
Of hilly fields, and meadows and the sea,
With some fair bark, perhaps, whose sails light up
The slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two isles
Of purple shadow! Yes! they wander on
In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad,
My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined
And hungered after Nature, many a year,
In the great City pent, winning thy way
With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain
And strange calamity! Ah!—slowly sink
Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!
Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,
Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!
Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!
And kindle, thou blue Ocean! So my friend,
Struck with deep joy, may stand, as I have stood. . . .
Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower, have I not marked
Much that has soothed me. . . . Henceforth I shall know
That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure;
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
No waste so vacant, but may well employ
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
Awake to Love and Beauty! . . .
My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last rook
Beat its straight path along the dusky air
Homewards, I blest it! deeming, its black wing
. . . . . .

Had cross'd the mighty orb's dilated glory,
While thou stood'st gazing ; or when all was still,
Flew creaking o'er thy head, and had a charm
For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles, to whom
No sound is dissonant which tells of Life."

For some reason Charles Lamb, when he read the poem on its publication some years later, quite seriously resented the epithet "gentle-hearted." "Please . . . substitute," he wrote, "drunken dog, ragged head, seld-shaven, odd-eyed, stuttering, or any other epithet which truly and properly belongs to the gentleman in question." It is difficult to understand why Lamb should have felt so strongly ; perhaps the reiteration was annoying ; perhaps, as has been suggested, the words seemed to express something of patronage which the younger man may have felt in his friend's attitude. In itself, it is surely an epithet which the bravest man might be proud to deserve ; and, as Wordsworth knew, it was one which surely fitted Charles Lamb.

"Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,
Has vanished from his lonely hearth,"

he was to write in 1835.

Coleridge's poem renders faithfully the Stowey scenery. Dorothy Wordsworth was charmed with the country. "There is everything here," she wrote, "sea, woods wild as fancy ever painted, brooks clear and pebbly as in Cumberland, villages so romantic. The woods are as fine as those at Lowther, and the country more romantic ; it has the character of the less grand parts of the neighbourhood of the lakes." One spot in particular struck her fancy. "William and I, in a wander by ourselves, found out a sequestered waterfall in a dell formed by steep hills covered with full-grown timber trees." Was it the place of which Coleridge had sung—

"That still roaring dell, of which I told"?

Anyhow, it is for the Wordsworthian a haunted place, and "a spirit in his feet" guides him thither when he is in the west country.

Making for the hills, he soon leaves Nether Stowey hidden by a turn of the road, and mounts gently, and, on the whole, continuously. Soon he is actually among the Quantocks ; they fill up the range of his left-hand vision ; on the right he has the

not very distant Bristol Channel. At last, when he has passed the "Castle of Comfort," once an inn, now a lodging-house, in its leafy recess by the roadside, the hills are all about him, and are everything in the landscape—ferny knolls ablaze with gorse; delicious coombs dark with dwarfish oak and spreading holly; quarries of dark red Devonian sandstone. As the road turns seaward he finds himself in woods of the kind which suggest the proximity of a country house. Yet there is no house, no entrance-gate to be seen. There is, however, a little woodland village with its church and inn and a stream bickering through it. Its name is Holford; and here the Wordsworthian leaves the highroad, crosses the stream, and follows it further into the recesses of the wood. After some windings he comes to the expected gate, and enters on a long avenue, with woods on either side, having much undergrowth of shaggy holly, and the bickering stream always on his right. Before he scrambles down to pry into the stream's secrets, he must go on to see whither the avenue is leading him. It is leading him, he finds, to a fine many-windowed old mansion. There is a garden in front and by the side, but the entrance-door is on the other side of the house, looking out on a delightful concave of the Quantocks, ferny and shaggy, where deer are browsing. It is Alfoxden, or, more strictly, Alfoxton, House, owned, in 1797, by the St. Albyns.

To the house the enthusiast will return presently; but the spirit in his feet will not rest till it has taken him down to the deep bed of the stream, where there is a rude bridge, and the water whirls and eddies round an islanded rock, making quite a little cascade. It is—it must be—Dorothy's place of the "sequestered waterfall in a dell." But the spot has more definite and memorable associations than these. It is the spot which became a "chosen resort" of Wordsworth; the spot which was the birthplace of a new philosophy, a new poetry, of Nature and Man. It was here that the lines came into being—

"I heard a thousand blended notes," etc.

The domestic arrangements of the Coleridges and Wordsworths were, in those days at least, so like a fairy-tale, that we are not much surprised by anything that happened. We know that they had Racedown for nothing from Mr. Pinney

of Bristol. To such casual nomads it was the most natural thing in the world to leave Racedown for a fortnight's visit and never return to it! Dorothy and her brother wandered along the Holford brook until they saw Alfoxden House, and though they never thought of living in so fine a mansion, and only longed for some cottage near by, the fairies presented them with the mansion itself. It was to be let, and let upon terms preternatural surely, even in 1797. In the absence of the owners the tenant of the house-farm, John Bartholomew, made an agreement with William Wordsworth to let to him Alfoxden House, furniture, gardens, stables, and coach-house, and to put him in immediate possession for one year from the preceding midsummer (the date of the agreement being July 14) for £23, free of rates and taxes. And apparently Wordsworth was to be allowed to remain on indefinitely, if he desired to do so, at the same rent!

And so, when the Stowey fortnight was over, when the walks and the readings in and talks about poetry in Coleridge's cottage had come to an end, when Charles Lamb had gone back to London "feeling improvement in the recollection of many a casual conversation," and with Wordsworth's lines ringing in his ears—

> "Nay, traveller, rest! This lonely yew-tree stands," etc.

Wordsworth and his sister went on to take up house at Alfoxden. We may suppose that the maid was sent for, or even possibly fetched, from Racedown, bringing little Basil Montagu in her charge. The settling into the furnished house was an easy process for such birds of the air as William and Dorothy; and by August 14 Dorothy was writing: "Here we are in a large mansion, in a large park with seventy head of deer around us. . . . It was a month yesterday since we came. There is furniture enough for a dozen families like ours. There is a very excellent garden, well stocked with vegetables and fruit. . . . In front is a little court, with grass plot, gravel walk, and shrubs; the moss roses were in full beauty a month ago. The front of the house is to the south; but it is screened from the sun by a high hill. . . . From the end of the house we have a view of the sea . . . and exactly opposite the window where I now sit is an immense wood,

whose round top from this point has exactly the appearance of a mighty dome. . . . Wherever we turn we have woods, smooth downs, and valleys with small brooks running down them. . . . The hills that cradle these valleys are either covered with fern or bilberries, or oak woods. . . . The Tor of Glastonbury is before our eyes during more than half of our walk to Stowey; and in the park wherever we go, keeping about fifteen yards above the house, it makes a part of our prospect."

All those things the visitor can see to-day, in a primitive solitude, untouched as yet by modern inventions and adaptations.

"Our principal inducement," Dorothy wrote, "was Coleridge's society." The inner significance of the Alfoxden life of the Wordsworths, which lasted just a year, is the association with Coleridge. It was so close and constant, and the genius of the three was so glowing with early fire, that it was a real creative fusion, like the welding of metals. "We are three people," said Coleridge, "but only one soul." And the first tangible result was *Lyrical Ballads*, which changed the face of English literature.

The comings and goings between Nether Stowey and Alfoxden were incessant. Almost immediately after the Wordsworths entered on possession Coleridge went to stay at Alfoxden, and he was followed next morning in time for breakfast by Mrs. Coleridge, who brought with her an interesting guest. John Thelwall, born in 1764, and therefore a good deal older than Wordsworth and Coleridge, the son of a Bristol tradesman, was one of the recruits whom the west country supplied to the revolutionary liberalism of the time. He became an attorney, then a radical journalist; then a follower of Horne Tooke, and one of the Society of the Friends of the People; with Horne Tooke he went to prison in 1794, an early victim of the repressive policy in England, which followed the execution of King Louis XVI. in France. He was now sobering down, drifting about in search of country quarters, and soon to settle at Llyswen on the Upper Wye. He had come to see Coleridge on the strength of supposed political sympathy; and Coleridge, though he repudiated most of Thelwall's opinions, liked the man, and was glad to introduce him to Wordsworth. So "Citizen John," as he was called in the cant revolutionary

parlance, was one of the little house-party at Alfoxden in July, 1797; wandering among the woods and hills with the two poets, making acquaintance with the dell and its waterfall, and discussing all things in heaven and earth. The maid from Racedown, if she ever came, had not yet arrived; an old woman from an adjoining cottage did what was necessary in the house. Thelwall wrote in raptures to his wife about the place and the visit, and especially about the dell with the waterfall. As the party were sitting there one day, Coleridge said to Thelwall: "Citizen John, this is a fine place to talk treason in!" and Thelwall replied, "Nay! Citizen Samuel, it is rather a place to make a man forget that there is any necessity for treason."* Political orthodoxy in the neighbourhood, as represented by the Pooles, was much scandalized by the intimacy with the ex-prisoner; and, as we shall see, the Wordsworths had to rue it.

Five important sources exist as to the Alfoxden life. The most vivid is a journal kept by Dorothy Wordsworth in 1798, in which the daily life of the "three persons with one soul" is faithfully and artlessly mirrored. Another is some lines of reminiscence by Wordsworth himself in the last book of *The Prelude*. Thirdly, there is Coleridge's poem, *The Nightingale*, written in April, 1798. Fourthly, there are Wordsworth's and Coleridge's prose accounts of the origin of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Lastly, and best of all, there is the totality of the work of the two poets which originated at Nether Stowey and Alfoxden.

Dorothy Wordsworth's Alfoxden journal gives good earnest of her wonderful journal of the Wordsworths' tour in Scotland in 1803, which, when first published in its fulness more than thirty years ago, revealed to the world the dimensions of her genius. There is not a sentence of the Alfoxden entries which does not testify to originality and individuality; to the seeing eye, the understanding heart, and the power of choosing in expression the smiting, revealing, unforgettable word. The very artlessness of the writing, and the tameness (as the majority would estimate it) of the experiences, make the fragment the more precious. Sentences, phrases, taken at random, are enough to show what a companion for poets was this girl. "After the wet, dark days,

* So, substantially, the anecdote appears in Coleridge's "Table-Talk." Wordsworth tells it differently in his notes on the poem *An Anecdote for Fathers*.

the country seems more populous. It peoples itself in the sunbeams." "Moss cups more proper than acorns for fairy goblets." "The sound of the sea distinctly heard on the tops of the hills, which we could never hear in summer. We attribute this partly to the bareness of the trees, but chiefly to the absence of the singing of birds, the hum of insects, that noiseless noise which lives in the summer air." "The half-dead sound of the near sheep-bell." "The shapes of the mist, slowly moving along, exquisitely beautiful; passing over the sheep they almost seemed to have more of life than those quiet creatures." One might go on quoting without limit. What other English prose of the sort, so careful, so loving, so imaginative, is there to be found at that epoch?

One or two of the entries point curiously beyond themselves. Here, for example, is an entry for March 7. "William and I drank tea at Coleridge's. . . . Observed nothing particularly interesting. . . . One only leaf upon the top of a tree—the sole remaining leaf—danced round and round like a rag blown by the wind." Surely they must have talked of that leaf at Coleridge's tea-table, or had Coleridge a sight of the entry afterwards? For who does not know the stanza of *Christabel?*

"The night is chill; the forest bare;
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?
There is not wind enough in the air
To move away the ringlet curl
From the lovely lady's cheek—
There is not wind enough to twirl
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can,
Hanging so light, and hanging so high
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky."

Again, is this only a coincidence? "January 31. When we left home the moon immensely large, the sky scattered over with clouds. These soon closed in, contracting the dimensions of the moon without concealing her." So far Dorothy. Now hear Coleridge—

"Is the night chilly and dark?
The night is chilly, but not dark,
The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky.
The moon is behind, and at the full;
And yet she looks both small and dull."

Naturally, there are several links between the Journal and Wordsworth's poems written at this time. *E.g.*, hear Dorothy :— "Went to Poole's after tea. The sky spread over with one continuous cloud, whitened by the light of the moon, which, though her dim shape was seen, did not throw forth so strong a light as to chequer the earth with shadows. At once the clouds seemed to cleave asunder, and left her in the centre of a black-blue vault. She sailed along, followed by multitudes of stars, small and bright and sharp. Their brightness seemed concentrated." And now hear William's blank verse :—

> "The sky is overcast
> With a continuous cloud of texture close,
> Heavy and wan, all whitened by the Moon,
> Which through that veil is indistinctly seen,
> A dull, contracted circle, yielding light
> So feebly spread, that not a shadow falls,
> Chequering the ground—from rock, plant, tree, or tower.
> At length a pleasant instantaneous gleam
> Startles the pensive traveller while he treads
> His lonesome path with unobserving eye
> Bent earthwards ; he looks up—the clouds are split
> Asunder,—and above his head he sees
> The clear Moon, and the glory of the heavens.
> There, in a black-blue vault, she sails along,
> Followed by multitudes of stars, that, small,
> And sharp, and bright, along the dark abyss
> Drive as she drives ! how fast they wheel away,
> Yet vanish not !—the wind is in the tree,
> But they are silent ;—still they roll along
> Immeasurably distant ; and the vault,
> Built round by those white clouds, enormous clouds,
> Still deepens its unfathomable depth.
> At length the Vision closes ; and the mind ;
> Not undisturbed by the delight it feels,
> Which slowly settles into peaceful calm,
> Is left to muse upon the solemn scene."

Here, it is evident, there is more than resemblance or suggestion ; there is joint composition of a very interesting kind. In a note to the poem, Wordsworth tells us that it was composed extempore on the road as he walked along, and one cannot doubt the correctness of his memory. Between the extemporaneous versifier and the artless journal-writer

there could be no question of plagiarism or *quasi*-plagiarism. How, then, are we to explain the relations between Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal and the contemporaneous poems of her brother and of Coleridge?

In all the instances which have been here brought forward there is either close paraphrase or actual identity in expression. Dorothy's "one only leaf upon the top of a tree—the sole remaining leaf—danced round and round like a rag" appears in Coleridge's version as—

> "The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
> That dances as often as dance it can,
> Hanging so light, and hanging so high."

Dorothy's "clouds soon closed in, contracting the dimensions of the moon without concealing her," is *mutatis mutandis*, Coleridge's—

> "The thin gray cloud is spread on high.
> The moon is behind and at the full,
> And yet she looks both small and dull."

In the third instance, that of Wordsworth's *Night Piece*, there is actual identity, in many cases, of phrases and epithets. "A continuous cloud," "whitened by the moon," "chequering the ground," "the black-blue vault," above all the wonderful trinity of epithets for the stars, "small, and bright, and *sharp*," are as nearly as possible identical. How are we to suppose that the work of expression was divided?

Wordsworth, he has told us, composed his *Night Piece* as he walked; and, therefore, he cannot have got his phrases from his sister's journal. On the other hand, Coleridge does not seem to have been with Dorothy when she saw the dancing red leaf and the moon contracted in dimensions "by the gray cloud"; and, therefore, he would seem to have learned of them from her.

I think there is a strong presumption that, in all those cases, the close observer, and possibly the originator of the distinctive phrases and epithets, was Dorothy. We know of similar instances of adoption from one another among the members of the Wordsworths' circle. The lines from *The Ancient Mariner*—

> "And thou art long and lank and brown
> As is the ribb'd sea-sand,"

were presented to Coleridge by Wordsworth. Wordsworth's phrase in his *Daffodils*,—"That inward eye which is the bliss of solitude" was given him by his wife. Wordsworth said of his sister in well-known lines: *She gave me eyes.* And Coleridge wrote of her in her goings out and in at Alfoxden—

> ". . . A most gentle Maid
> . . . . . at latest eve
> (Even like a lady vowed and dedicate
> To something more than Nature in the grove)
> Glides through the pathways; she knows all their notes,
> That gentle Maid!"

Is it too much to suppose that to both her two poet companions Dorothy may have supplied much of the minute observation, which Nature-poetry requires, and that imaginative insight into detail which is expressed by perfect epithet and incisive phrase? May we not feel sure that Coleridge's immortal pictures of dancing leaf and clouded moon were really hers, and that they got only their final touch of magic from him? Can we not hear the *Night Piece* coming into being between brother and sister on the Stowey road—his the rhythm, hers the wording at critical and cardinal points; wholly his the characteristic introspection at the end—

> "At length the vision closes; and the mind,
> *Not undisturbed by the delight it feels*,
> Which slowly settles into peaceful calm,
> Is left to muse upon the solemn scene"?

In fact, neither the poetry of Coleridge nor that of Wordsworth is characterized by the careful—though always purely æsthetic—registration of natural effects which we find in the Alfoxden Journal. It was the dower of the gentle maid who glided along the wild-wood paths and knew all the nightingale's notes.

To the constant and complete companionship of the trio, Dorothy's Journal bears ample testimony. "With Coleridge" is a constant entry; with Coleridge on the Stowey road in early spring days, "the midges or small flies spinning in the sunshine;" with Coleridge over the hills, "the sea at first obscured by vapour. . . . I never saw such a union of earth, sky and sea;" with Coleridge gathering sticks in the wood; with Coleridge listening to redbreasts in dripping February

snow, or on May evenings seeing the glow-worm and listening to the nightingale.

In the last book of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth refers to this idyllic time in lines of grave and affectionate reminiscence. It was still the time, let us never forget, of the healing of his soul which he attributed in so large measure to Dorothy. He has, therefore, much to say of her, of her planting of flowers in the crevices of his nature; of her breath going before his steps like a gentler spring in spring. But much of his recovery and adornment he traces to Coleridge, and his kindred influence. The result must have been marvellous, for it finds marvellous expression—

> "Thus fear relaxed
> Her overweening grasp; thus thoughts and things
> In the self-haunting spirit learned to take
> More rational proportions; mystery,
> The incumbent mystery of sense and soul,
> Of life and death, time and eternity,
> Admitted more habitually a mild
> Interposition—a serene delight
> In closelier gathering cares, such as become
> A human creature, howsoe'er endowed,
> Poet, or destined for a humbler name;
> And so the deep enthusiastic joy,
> The rapture of the hallelujah sent
> From all that breathes and is, was chastened, stemmed
> And balanced by pathetic truth, by trust
> In hopeful reason, leaning on the stay
> Of Providence; and in reverence for duty,
> Here, if need be, struggling with storms, and there
> Strewing in peace life's humblest ground with herbs,
> At every season green, sweet at all hours."

In particular, there stood out in Wordsworth's memory one summer. Internal evidence shows that it was the second half-summer spent at Alfoxden, that of 1798, the year of *Lyrical Ballads*.

> "That summer, under whose indulgent skies,
> Upon smooth Quantock's airy ridge we roved,
> Unchecked, or loitered 'mid her sylvan coombs,
> Thou, in bewitching words, with happy heart,
> Didst chaunt the vision of that Ancient Man,
> The bright-eyed Mariner, and rueful woes
> Didst utter of the Lady Christabel;

And I, associate with such labour, steeped
In soft forgetfulness the livelong hours,
Murmuring of him who, joyous hap, was found,
After the perils of his moonlight ride,
Near the loud waterfall; or her who sate
In misery near the miserable Thorn—
When thou dost to that summer turn thy thoughts,
And hast before thee all which then we were,
To thee, in memory of that happiness,
It will be known, by thee at least, my Friend!
Felt, that the history of a Poet's mind
Is labour not unworthy of regard."

Coleridge's poem, *The Nightingale*, is in a lighter vein, but equally inspired by the time, the place, and the companionship. The poem is very interesting, and full of beauty, though (as was often the case with Coleridge), unequal in style. Its main interest lies in its treatment of Nature; in the revelation it gives of Coleridge's individual attitude towards the non-human natural world. That attitude is at once Wordsworthian and not. The trio are sitting, in a moonless night—every trace of sunset faded, and dim stars overhead—on a bridge over a soundless stream. The poet blames Milton's phrase about the nightingale, *most musical, most melancholy!* which he holds to be vitiated by what Ruskin called the "pathetic fallacy," the transference of human feeling—in this case morbid—to natural objects. In an essentially Wordsworthian strain, he calls on the poet who would know Nature aright to forget her moods and yield himself to her. Let him stretch his limbs—

"Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell,
By sun or moonlight, to the influxes
Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements
Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song
And of his fame forgetful! so his fame
Should share in Nature's immortality,
A venerable thing! And so his song
Should make all Nature lovelier, and itself
Be loved like Nature!"

He goes on to translate the nightingale's singing into a strain too romantic, with too much of the jewellery of magic, for Wordsworth—

"'Tis the merry Nightingale
That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates

With fast thick warble his delicious notes,
As he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul
Of all its music!"

Alfoxden and Dorothy follow, both lifted into the world of faëry—

"And I know a grove
Of large extent, hard by a castle huge,
Which the great lord inhabits not; and so
This grove is wild with tangling underwood,
And the trim walks are broken up, and grass,
Thin grass and king-cups grow within the paths.
But never elsewhere in one place I knew
So many nightingales; and far and near,
In wood and thicket, over the wide grove,
They answer and provoke each other's songs,
With skirmish and capricious passagings,
And murmurs musical and swift jug-jug.
And one low piping sound more sweet than all—
Stirring the air with such an harmony,
That should you close your eyes, you might almost
Forget it was not day! On moonlight bushes,
Whose dewy leaflets are but half-disclosed,
You may perchance behold them on the twigs,
Their bright, bright eyes, their eyes both bright and full,
Glistening, while many a glow-worm in the shade
Lights up her love-torch."

And now comes Dorothy, in words some of which we have heard before; with a tribute to her insight into Nature.

"A most gentle Maid
Who dwelleth in her hospitable home
Hard by the castle, and at latest eve
(Even like a Lady vowed and dedicate
To something more than Nature in the grove)
Glides through the pathways; she knows all their notes,
That gentle Maid! and oft, a moment's space,
What time the moon was lost behind a cloud,
Hath heard a pause of silence; till the moon
Emerging, hath awakened earth and sky
With one sensation, and those wakeful birds
Have all burst forth in choral minstrelsy,
As if some sudden gale had swept at once
A hundred airy harps! And she hath watched

Many a nightingale perch giddily
On blossomy twig still swinging from the breeze,
And to that motion time his wanton song
Like tipsy joy that reels with tossing head."

Such nights were these at Alfoxden! And then the break-up, typical of almost nightly breaks-up—

"Farewell, O Warbler! till to-morrow eve,
And you, my friends, farewell, a short farewell!
We have been loitering long, and pleasantly,
And now for our dear homes."

And, after a pretty story about how one of his baby's "night-fears" was banished by his father's taking him out and showing him the moon in the orchard—

"Once more, farewell,
Sweet Nightingale! once more, my friends! farewell."

Coleridge's *Nightingale* was one of the *Lyrical Ballads;* and it is time now to speak of them, and what their makers meant by them and said about them. For it was to them that all this Quantock life led up.

Joint ventures in poetry were common in those days: Lovell and Southey co-operated; so did Lamb and Charles Lloyd. Coleridge and Wordsworth very seriously intended to be poets; and as they walked about they made not only poetry, but plans. One hardly serious idea was a prose-poem called the *Wanderings of Cain*, to consist of three cantos, of which Wordsworth was to write the first, and Coleridge the second. Whichever had first finished his task was to do the third. The whole work was to be completed in one night! Such *tours de force* were not in Wordsworth's line; and when Coleridge brought his canto, he found his colleague gazing with a "look of humorous despondency" at an almost blank sheet of paper. Coleridge's canto may still be read, with a characteristically melodious fragment of verse, the first instalment of what was to have been a poem on the same theme.

"Encinctured with a twine of leaves,
That leafy twine his only dress!
A lovely Boy was plucking fruits,
By moonlight, in a wilderness."

Another plan was ambitious and grandiose. In the minds

of both men the underlying interest was the interrelations of Man, Society, and Nature; the distant roar of French affairs was still in their ears, and mixed itself with the sounds of breeze and bird and stream in Somerset. While Wordsworth, at ease in the Alfoxden dell, looked at the sweet fellowship of primrose and periwinkle on the steep banks, he thought with pain of the "madding passions, mutually inflamed," of humanity—

> "Much it grieved my heart to think
> What man has made of man."

As Coleridge walked on the high table-lands of Quantock and among its sloping coombs, and looked at streamlets rising among "yellow-red moss" and "conical glass-shaped tufts of bent," becoming audible in little water-breaks, and working their way on and down, by lonely barn and sheepfold, to hamlet and village and then to sea-port and sea, he saw in them types of human society, on which a great poem might be built. Wordsworth's imagination, as we shall find, was to work towards the same end. But not yet; and meanwhile a simpler plan suggested itself.

In November, 1797, the trio set out on a longer expedition than usual. They were to round Quantock at the seaward end by Watchet, and make their way along the grand coast to Lynmouth, Lynton, and the Valley of Rocks. It was to be all done on foot; but there were inevitable expenses, and these were to be defrayed by a joint-poem, which they hoped would bring in £5. As they walked along under November skies, and before Watchet was reached, Coleridge told of a dream which had befallen a friend of his, about a skeleton ship with figures in it. Coleridge made a story out of the dream; and Wordsworth suggested a moral. He had been reading in Shelvocke's *Voyages* about the albatrosses which abound near Cape Horn. Let us make the navigators wantonly destroy one of these birds, he suggested, and be punished by their tutelary spirits. So the plan developed, Wordsworth contributing the idea of the ship's being navigated by dead men, but nothing else towards its structure. The same evening they began to write, the lead being taken by Coleridge, but Wordsworth contributing some lines.

It was the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* which had its origin that day. As a joint-composition it failed as completely as the *Wanderings of Cain*. From first to last, in conception and execution, in general scheme and in details, it bore Coleridge's unmistakable and inalienable sign-manual. Wordsworth soon gave up the completion of the Old Navigator's story into his friend's hands; and it is improbable that much more of it was written during the November walking-tour. The project of a poem to pay expenses was given up, and the joint plans of the poets took a wider shape.

In their Stowey and Alfoxden intercourse, Wordsworth and Coleridge had many discussions about the theory of poetry, and the functions of that faculty of imagination from which what is greatest in poetry comes. Each was occupied in the making of poems instinct with the individuality of powerful young genius; so theory and practice suggested one another in the most natural manner, and poetry and the criticism of poetry went hand in hand. Standing on the edge of the Romantic Revival, both poets were deeply conscious of two things: namely, that poetry ought to give pleasure by the surprise of novelty; and that, since Milton, it had relied too much on artificial magniloquence and violent improbability for that purpose. There must, they agreed, be a "return to Nature," if the power and charm of poetry were to be legitimate; and that return could only be made by the stern avoidance of artificiality and conventionality in expression, and the production of novelty by the spontaneous exercise of imagination. The proper subjects of poetry were natural, and in that sense ordinary; but they must be made extraordinary, surprising, novel, by the poet's imaginative treatment, as a common landscape is transfigured by a sudden gush of sunset or moonlight. And now, two different methods of treatment suggested themselves. Poetry must be true to fact, true to the realities of human nature; but it need not reject the preternatural. Introduce a preternatural machinery if you will; but only on condition that it somehow helps the presentment of the natural. Present the illusory, if you will; but only if thereby you may the better stimulate emotion which captures and holds, not by its unreality but by its intense reality. But then, on the other hand, the poet might dispense with the preternatural or even with the explicitly

romantic, and, without suffering imagination to abdicate any of its functions, might find, in the persons, scenes, and incidents of ordinary experience, the novelty and surprise which poetry requires, until the natural should seem preternatural.

A series of poems was to be written illustrating these two methods. Coleridge, who affected the preternatural more than Wordsworth, Coleridge who had taken the lead in the *Ancient Mariner*, was to choose preternatural and "romantic" themes; Wordsworth was to exhibit the romance of every-day experience.

Accordingly, through the second Alfoxden half year, in the spring and summer of 1798, the double task proceeded, but in a most unequal manner. Coleridge had appropriated the completion of the *Ancient Mariner;* but Wordsworth outran his desultory colleague in the preparation of *Lyrical Ballads.* Coleridge finished the *Mariner*, and wrote also the first part of *Christabel*, and a fragment called the *Dark Ladie;* but neither *Christabel*, nor the *Dark Ladie* appeared in the joint-volume. The *Mariner* was the sole representative of the preternatural poetry; and Coleridge added to it only the *Nightingale* poem, which we know already, and one or two dramatic fragments. Wordsworth on the other hand, worked industriously at his object, viz. "to give the charm of novelty to things of every day"; and produced, as he tells us, *The Idiot Boy;* the lines beginning, *Her Eyes are Wild; We are Seven; The Thorn;* and others.

The friendly Joseph Cottle was of course to be the publisher. He went to see the poets in May, staying for a week at Alfoxden with Wordsworth. The authors and the publisher conferred about the volume; they made another expedition to Lynton and the Valley of Rocks. The volume was to be called *Lyrical Ballads;* it was to be published forthwith; and Cottle was to give thirty guineas for the copyright. The proofs were corrected in the course of the summer, and the book appeared in September. It was a small volume, of two hundred and ten pages.

Such is the external history of a book which initiated the higher Romanticism in England and brought Wordsworth into the front rank of English poetry. So slight was Coleridge's share in it that the work was essentially Wordsworth's; and by

it alone we may almost say that Wordsworth stands or falls. Here is his characteristic strength, here his characteristic weakness; here, born among the Alfoxden hollies and the ferny coombs of Quantock, is that poetry of Nature, that philosophy of common life, which has been a religion or a mockery to succeeding generations.

It is, first of all, as the outcome of a gentle open-air life, the life reflected in Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal, that these poems interest us. The Wordsworthian visitor to the west country, as he journeys piously between Alfoxden and Nether Stowey, sees the *Lyrical Ballads* written large everywhere. In the green meadow outside the Alfoxden gate, is the place which held the cottage of "Simon Lee" the old huntsman, whom Wordsworth places in "the sweet shire of Cardigan," but who was really huntsman to the Alfoxden squires, the old man whom the poet, with his strong sinews, once helped to unearth the stump of a tree, and who poured forth thanks and praises in such abundance that Wordsworth thought, "They never would have done." At the door of Alfoxden House stood the tall larch on which the redbreast sang that "first mild day of March" which will live, we may predict, till time shall be no longer. At the same spot, and at the same jocund season, Wordsworth put little Basil Montagu into the ethical difficulty from which only the Alfoxden weathercock could extricate him. Once more, it was in front of Alfoxden House (with the usual mystification as to persons and places) that the brace of dialogues known as *Expostulation and Reply* and *The Tables Turned* was made, in which the simplest verse is made to express the deepest Wordsworthian thought. In the Alfoxden groves walking up and down, the poet bethought him of the little girl he had talked to at Goodrich five years before, the girl who would not admit that death had really removed any of her dear ones. Beginning his verses with the child's impregnable phrase, "Nay, we are Seven!" Wordsworth made the poem we know, and took it in to read it to Dorothy and Coleridge. As it stood it began with the second stanza—

"I met a little cottage girl;"

and Wordsworth felt that it needed an introductory verse. "I

want to make one before tea," he said; whereupon Coleridge suggested the line—

"A simple child, dear brother Jem," etc.

("Dear brother Jem" was a common friend, and the allusion was a freak). Wordsworth adopted the line promptly; and, though dear brother Jem himself objected, the line remained the first of *We are Seven* in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. *The Thorn* grew on the Quantocks, and Wordsworth fitted a legend to it. *The Last of the Flock* was a Holford story. *The Idiot Boy*, the mark of so many satiric shafts, was made on foot among the Alfoxden hollies, on a theme supplied by Thomas Poole, viz. the idiot's phrase in the last stanza—

"The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,
And the sun did shine so cold!"

The Alfoxden poetry of Wordsworth is not all to be found between the boards of the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. *Peter Bell* also was written within those groves, though not published until 1819; and the greater part of *The Old Cumberland Beggar*.

What is the inner significance of it all? The criticism, favourable and unfavourable, passed on Wordsworth's early poetry by his contemporaries is full of interest and importance; but the interest and importance belong to the history of criticism rather than to the history of poetry. As readers of poetry, what we now ask is not what Southey or Jeffrey or Charles Lamb thought of the *Lyrical Ballads*, but what we ourselves think and feel about them, we ourselves, remembering what went before them, and what has come after, and dowered at least with the sure intuition of posterity, that intuition which nothing short of genius can confer on the contemporary reviewer. What is it, then, that we think and feel?

With regard to the West-country poetry of both Coleridge and Wordsworth, we realize, to begin with, that it stretches far beyond the bounds of the plan on which much of it was undertaken. We ought to judge it relatively to that plan; but we ought also to judge it absolutely. In so far as the plan was a joint one, we have already seen that it at once broke down. Wordsworth not only avoided the preternatural; he theoretically

despised it. This is clearly set forth in the prologue to *Peter Bell.*

Again, as regards his own particular object, the operation of imagination on lowly themes, expressed in ordinary language, Wordsworth, even thus early, attained a far more than merely controversial success. He really contributed richly to the poetry of common life, and did not merely illustrate argumentative assertions about it. He really understood and interpreted Nature, and did not merely show how it ought to be interpreted and understood. He took his place in a trinity, of which the other two members were Blake and Burns, a trinity of reformers indeed, but also of absolutely great poets. Burns met his unhappy fate two years and a half before *Lyrical Ballads.* In July, 1796, when poetic life was opening for Wordsworth at Racedown, Burns, on the Solway flats, was pleading, like the dying Goethe, for "more light." "Let him shine," he said to the friend whose kind hand would have warded off from his eyes the level rays of the low sun sinking to the Galloway hills; "Let him shine; he'll not shine long for me." Wordsworth knew one of the great things that Burns had done for British poetry, and felt the blow of his death. "I mourned," he was to write afterwards—

> "I mourned with thousands, but as one
> More deeply grieved, for He was gone
> Whose light I hailed when first it shone,
> And showed my youth
> How verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth."

And the force of the *Lyrical Ballads* is less fully conveyed by any of Wordsworth's or Coleridge's *apologiae*, than, by anticipation, in the stanzas in which Burns commemorates his own call and consecration to the poet's mission, when Coila, the Muse, told him how she had watched his early development.

It is interesting to notice that so far was Burns from looking on himself as a great reformer, that he felt hopeless of rivalling the excellence of those eighteenth-century poets, Thomson, Shenstone, Gray, whom we hardly read, and whom Wordsworth would hardly deign to commend.

In Blake there are many tones not to be heard in Wordsworth; but the *Songs of Innocence* had been ten years before

the world when the *Lyrical Ballads* appeared; and they came from the self-same fount—

> "And I plucked a hollow reed,
> And I made a rural pen,
> And I stained the water clear,
> And I wrote my happy songs
> Every child may joy to hear."

To build a princely throne on humble truth. That, as Wordsworth truly divined, was Burns' ideal, and it was, even in the *Lyrical Ballads*, his own striking achievement. The humility of the truth all readers will be ready to admit; but there will be question as to the princeliness of the throne. In spite of the poet's comprehensive and repeated repudiations of preternaturalism, *The Thorn* is as instinct with the preternatural as any old-world ballad or as *Christabel* itself. The power of uncanny suggestion is freely used in it. Wordsworth's object was to invent a story which should express the genius of a stunted thorn as he saw it tormented by storm on the Quantocks. By the thorn there was a muddy pond, and not far off a mossy mound, enchanting in green and vermilion. From the beginning these three objects are treated with an intensity which requires suggestion for its realization. The lichens and mosses on the thorn are malign things: they are bent—

> "With plain and manifest intent
> To drag it to the ground;
> And all have joined in one endeavour
> To bury this poor thorn for ever."

The muddy pond calls out for a dead body. "The heap of earth o'ergrown with moss," "so fresh in all its beauteous dyes," is so like an infant's grave that an infant must somehow be buried there. And so we are brought to a woman in a scarlet cloak crying mysteriously by day and by night,

> "Oh misery! oh misery!
> Oh woe is me! oh misery!"

The cause of her misery no man may know for certain. "They say" this and "They say" that about it. There was a seduction, of course; a desertion, and a child. Yet stay; *was* there a child?

"No earthly tongue could ever tell." But some there are who maintain that cries come on winter nights from the place where the thorn grows; and some will "swear" that among the cries are voices of the dead. Did the mother hang her baby on the tree or drown it in the pond? Anyhow one thing is certain; if there was a baby it is buried under the lovely mound. Some say the vermilion cups are drops of infant's blood; others that a baby's face looks up at you from the face of the pond. Others relate that when justice, suspecting murder, was about to dig for infant's bones, the hill of moss plainly moved, and the grass all round was alive with shudderings! As to all this the poet knows nothing. Only the tree remains, the tree he saw, with the figure he imagined :—

"I cannot tell how this may be,
But plain it is the Thorn is bound
With heavy tufts of moss that strive
To drag it to the ground;
And this I know, full many a time,
When she was on the mountain high,
By day, and in the silent night,
When all the stars shone clear and bright,
That I have heard her cry,
Oh misery! oh misery!
Oh woe is me! oh misery!"

Preternaturalism, however, plays a small part in this early poetry of Wordsworth. The deepest burden of the *Lyrical Ballads* is the characteristic Wordsworthian philosophy of Nature and Man which appears in them. In its most profoundly suggestive form, that philosophy is expressed in some of the slightest of the poems. In the *Lines written in Early Spring*, for example, the primroses and periwinkles of the Alfoxden dell, the budding twigs and "twinkling" birds, suggest what seems a mere play of fancy, but is, in Wordsworth, an interpretation of the Universe. To the poet, as he lay in that sweet place, there came the conviction, not only of life, all round him, not only of beauty, but of sentient pleasure.

"Through primrose tufts, in that sweet bower
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths,
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The budding twigs spread forth their fan
To catch the breezy air.
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there."

And the belief in Nature as happily, beautifully, and even self-consciously, alive, immediately suggests the contrasted picture of humanity.

"If this belief from Heaven be sent,
If such be Nature's holy plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man?"

Again in the poems called *Expostulation and Reply*, and *The Tables Turned*, as well as in the lines beginning—

"It is the first mild day of March,"

the spiritual activities of Nature are indicated with startling freshness.

"Love, now a universal birth
From heart to heart is stealing,
From earth to man, from man to earth:
It is the hour of feeling.

"And from the blessed power that rolls
About, below, above,
We'll frame the measure of our souls,
They shall be tuned to love."

"Nor less I deem that there are Powers
Which of themselves our minds impress;
That we can feed this mind of ours
In a wise passiveness."

"Let Nature be your teacher.
She has a world of ready wealth,
Our minds and hearts to bless,
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

"One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can."

The Alfoxden poetry of Wordsworth stands out as a poetry of humble life. In reading it we may forget the poet's theoretic

claim for peasants and their language, and enjoy (or otherwise) the poetry as poetry. Does it justify itself? Such a poetry has three incontestable claims. It may plead the oneness of the human nature common to all men, with its potentialities of grandeur and tragedy; it lends itself to pathos; and it lends itself to humour. Which of these claims is satisfied by the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, or by any of the west country poetry outside the limits of that edition?

In this early work Wordsworth as yet hardly touches the tragic or sublime in human life. *Her Eyes are Wild* is tragedy, passionate tragedy. The tragedy in *The Thorn* and *The Forsaken Indian Woman* is purely artificial. Perhaps the dignity of the peasant is most worthily shown in *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, with its beautiful pendant, *Animal Tranquillity and Decay*. The political economy indeed of the former is dubious: on that side the poem is a plea for mendicancy as against the workhouse. But it is also a plea for something very different, for the greatness of man as man.

> "'Tis Nature's law
> That none, the meanest of created things,
> Or forms created the most vile and brute,
> The dullest or most noxious, should exist
> Divorced from good—a spirit and pulse of good,
> A life and soul, to every mode of being
> Inseparably linked. Then be assured
> That least of all can aught that ever owned
> The heaven-regarding eye and front sublime
> Which man is born to—sink, howe'er depressed,
> So low as to be scorned without a sin."

And the sunset of humble life shines grandly in the pendant lines—

> "The little hedgerow birds
> That peck along the roads, regard him not.
> He travels on, and in his face, his step,
> His gait, is one expression; every limb,
> His look and bending figure, all bespeak
> A man who does not move with pain, but moves
> With thought. He is insensibly subdued
> To settled quiet; he is one by whom
> All effort seems forgotten; one to whom
> Long patience hath such mild composure given

That patience now doth seem a thing of which
He hath no need. He is by nature led
To peace so perfect that the young behold
With envy, what the old man hardly feels."

In one or two of the poems, Wordsworth shows that inconstant sense of dignity which has been one of the chief stumbling-blocks to his admirers. The humble, as he recognized to the blessing of the world, is a fit theme of poetry; the trivial, he was apt to forget, is not. *Simon Lee*, in spite of beautiful phrases, beautiful lines, in spite of its delicate poetic appreciativeness, is trivial in many places, and is dangerously near triviality throughout. But perhaps *The Last of the Flock* sins most seriously against the great law of dignity. The poet meets a man on the public road near Holford, a man in tears, carrying a lamb in his arms.

"He saw me, and he turned aside,
As if he wished himself to hide;
And with his coat did then essay
To wipe those briny tears away.
I followed him, and said, 'My friend,
What ails you? Wherefore weep you so?'
'Shame on me, sir! this lusty lamb,
He makes my tears to flow.
To-day I fetched him from the rock;
He is the last of all my flock.'"

This lachrymose person is another victim of the dismal science. He started life with a capital of one ewe, from which he raised fifty sheep. We are given a most incomplete account of the flockmaster's circumstances; but, apparently, he could not support his six children on his income. He therefore applied for parish relief, and was told that he must use up his capital before he could be entitled to receive it. This, with much natural agitation, he proceeded to do. Quite naturally also—

"Every week and every day,
My flock it seemed [why seemed?] to melt away.
They dwindled, Sir, sad sight to see!
From ten to five, from five to three,
A lamb, a wether, and a ewe;—
And then at last from three to two;
And of my fifty, yesterday
I had but only one:

And here it lies upon my arm,
Alas! and I have none;—
To-day I fetched it from the rock;
It is the last of all my flock."

In this poem the pathos is nullified by the obscurity and doubtful ethics of the situation, and the unmanly nervelessness of the hero. From such art, we feel, the dignity of the humble can gain nothing.

It may seem paradoxical to say so, but it is surely true, that a large part of the significance, and the significance for good, of the Alfoxden poetry depends upon that quality with which Wordsworth was so slenderly endowed, viz. humour. Wordsworth's humour was a relatively small element in his constitution; but it was there, and it was genuine, and of the first *Lyrical Ballads* and of *Peter Bell* it is a main inspiration. The failure to recognize it explains and condemns much of the ridicule with which Wordsworth's early poetry was greeted. *Goody Blake*, *The Idiot Boy*, and *Peter Bell* are essentially humorous poems, and, realized as such, there seems no reason why they should seem ridiculous or other than successful and delightful. *Goody Blake* is a ballad-idyll of peasant life, in which a delicate sprinkling of preternatural suggestion is laid on a basis of verisimilitude in incident, the excellence of the lyrical style being secured by the humour of the treatment. Contrast it in this respect with *The Last of the Flock*, where there is no humour.

The flockmaster is poor—

"Six Children, Sir! had I to feed;
Hard labour in a time of need!
My pride was tamed, and in our grief
I of the Parish asked relief.
They said, I was a wealthy man;
My sheep upon the uplands fed,
And it was fit that thence I took
Whereof to buy us bread.
Do this; how can we give to you,
They cried, what to the poor is due?"

There is no charm of lyrical style there.

Goody Blake is poor—

"O joy for her! whene'er in winter
The winds at night had made a rout;

And scattered many a lusty splinter
And many a rotten bough about,
Yet never had she, well or sick,
As every man who knew her says,
A pile beforehand, turf or stick,
Enough to warm her for three days.

Now, when the frost was past enduring,
And made her poor old bones to ache,
Could anything be more alluring
Than an old hedge to Goody Blake?
And, now and then, it must be said,
When her old bones were cold and chill,
She left her fire, or left her bed,
To seek the hedge of Harry Gill."

Here there is unmistakable and undeniable charm, and it is the charm of humour.

As for *The Idiot Boy*, about which a great many foolish things have been said, it is really as humorous as *John Gilpin*, and seems to stand as little in need of apology. The intrinsic dignity of the two situations seems about equal; and if the fun of *The Idiot Boy* is less apparent and less rollicking than that of *John Gilpin*, its atmosphere and local colouring are more poetic, and it counts for much as a rendering of life and landscape. It is one of Wordsworth's most inspired and inevitable poems; it is built on a hearsay phrase, and it was poured forth extemporaneously as the poet walked in the Alfoxden groves. There may be too much of it; but if it is not true and delightful poetry, one knows not where true and delightful poetry is to be found.

It is the same with *Peter Bell*, only the charm is deeper. It is the charm (the paradox must be repeated) of humour; it is the charm (another paradox) of style. Style, like humour, is one of the qualities the possession of which is most often denied to Wordsworth. It is indeed true that his style was uncertain and variable, as his sense of humour was inconstant. But the Alfoxden poetry as a whole is no exception to the law that good verse is never written in a bad style—in other words, that one can hardly in the criticism of poetry separate the thought from the expression. Wordsworth's power at its strongest is demonstrably a power of verbal distinction, a power of phrase, a power of noble rhythm. This is made abundantly clear in *Lyrical Ballads* and in *Peter Bell.*

The connection of Coleridge and Wordsworth with the Quantock country carried within it the cause of its own dissolution. The poets had been drawn thither largely by revolutionary sympathies, and for revolutionary sympathies they were to be driven from it. By 1798 both Coleridge and Wordsworth had moved far from the ideals of any section of revolutionists in England or France. But the orthodox conservatism of Somerset took no heed of fine distinctions; even Thomas Poole had been suspect; and the queer Wordsworth in particular, living, with his wild-eyed sister, in a place so much too big for them and their means, wandering and muttering, and not afraid of consorting with John Thelwall himself, was it desirable that he should continue to have Alfoxden on such easy terms; nay, was it altogether safe to let him go about unwatched? The St. Albyn family began to have qualms. There seems incontestable authority for stating that a spy was sent down by government to look after the poets; and Southey told his brother, seven years later, that "The fellow, after trying to tempt the country people to tell lies, could collect nothing more than that the gentlemen used to walk a good deal upon the coast, and that they were what they called poets. He got drunk at the inn, and told his whole errand and history."

Wordsworth was blissfully unconscious of the *espionage*, and stoutly maintained that nobody annoyed him or made difficulties about his staying on at Alfoxden. But his memory must have played him false, or he must have been "blissfully havened" from the facts. As early as September, 1797, Tom Poole, taking full responsibility for introducing Wordsworth as a tenant, wrote to Mrs. St. Albyn with the view of reassuring her as to his respectability. He believed him "to be in every respect a gentleman." He referred to his uncle, Canon Cookson of Windsor, as in himself a sufficient warranty. "But I am informed," Poole proceeded, "you have heard that Mr. W. does keep company, and on this head I fear the most infamous falsehoods have reached your ears. Mr. W. is a man fond of retirement—fond of reading and writing—and has never had above two gentlemen at a time with him." John Thelwall had come to see Coleridge one day, and had turned up unexpectedly at Alfoxden. Could ordinary hospitality have been refused him? And would not anybody wish to see so interesting a man as

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BY W. CROWBENT

Thelwall? "Be assured, and I speak it from my own knowledge, that Mr. W., of all men alive, is the last who will give any one cause to complain of his opinions, his conduct, or his disturbing the peace of any one."

In spite of all, the happy spring and early summer days were spent in the knowledge that the Wordsworths were going in a few months. In March, Wordsworth wrote to a friend, saying that they were "obliged" to quit at midsummer, and announcing a "delightful scheme" of going with the Coleridges to Germany for a time. And so it came about. The Wordsworths left Alfoxden on June 26, 1798; they lingered in various places (one of them being Bristol, to superintend the printing of *Lyrical Ballads*), and in September they set sail with Coleridge for Hamburg.

One poem in *Lyrical Ballads*, the last and greatest in the volume, perhaps the most characteristic breathing of the most characteristic Wordsworth spirit, was made after the Quantocks had been left for ever.* It would be tedious to transcribe it, and profane to mutilate it. It must be read as a whole, and pondered until it is known and loved by heart. The brother and sister stayed with Coleridge for a week at Nether Stowey; then they went to the Wye. Wordsworth had been there five years before; the whole region, and especially Tintern Abbey, was for him alive with pensive reminiscence, and prophetic of deep spiritual change. As he stood there on that July day of 1798, he felt within him the drama of his soul; the boyhood of animal enjoyment; the youth of rapture in the sights and sounds of Nature; the jarring shock of humanity; the restoration of faith and love; the unspeakable sense of God. And to the great drama was added a wonderful epilogue, where the brother, finding himself in the sister, dedicates her to his own glorious fate.

* *Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey.*

CHAPTER V

ROBERT SOUTHEY

OF the many eminent men who knew Wordsworth, or were in any way associated with him, it is perhaps hardest to define accurately the place of Southey in the Wordsworthian circle. He was in it, yet not of it, just as he is, and yet is not, a classic of English literature. No great English writer calls more urgently for reconsideration than Southey. He is hardly read nowadays; to few is he much more than a name; yet he filled a large space in his time; no man ever worked harder or, in a sense, more successfully; he stands out as typical, both of his own age and of the purely and overwhelmingly literary temperament. There is about him and his career something unexplained, a touch of paradox, a trace of the injustice of fame, which makes him interesting.

If Southey was not quite in Wordsworth's circle, it was not for want of excellent opportunities, and it was in spite of near neighbourhood. Wordsworth settled at Grasmere in 1799, and Southey went to Greta Hall, close to Keswick, in 1803; from that year until the cold March day in 1843, when the aged Wordsworth came over the hills to his friend's burial in Crosthwaite churchyard, the two poets, the most home-keeping of men, lived not more than fifteen miles from one another. Southey was only four years Wordsworth's junior; they were bound together by their common interest in the Coleridges (Southey and Coleridge, we must not forget, married sisters); they began as revolutionary idealists, and they became—moving at much the same pace—unbending, alarmist, Church-and-State conservatives; they were, by design and devotion, poets—poets daring, original, independent, romantic; they felt for one another sincere admiration; no personal disagreement ever

arose to cloud their relationship. Yet they somehow belong to different worlds, and their separateness cannot be wholly explained by Wordsworth's unapproachable elevation. Wordsworth, as we have seen, was not closely akin to any of his compeers; but Southey was much less akin to him than Coleridge or Charles Lamb, or De Quincey, much less akin to him than Walter Scott. He was even less akin to him than those younger romantic poets, on whom Wordsworth looked with so cold a regard, than Shelley and Keats. In spite of his brilliant and versatile gifts, in spite of his being so excellent a poet and so admirably skilled in all literary craftsmanship, Southey perhaps never entered Wordsworth's real world at any point. Yet it is none the less interesting to study the relationships of the two men, their attractions and their repulsions.

The criticism under whose lash they both winced, the criticism whose discipline fashioned the Romantic Revival, put them unhesitatingly into the same class. In the judgment of Jeffrey and those like-minded with him, Southey, with Wordsworth and Coleridge, made up a sect, the sect to be known as the "Lake School." Reviewing *Thalaba,* the *Edinburgh* said: "The author . . . belongs to a sect of poets, that has established itself in this country within these ten or twelve years, and is looked upon, we believe, as one of its chief champions and apostles." At best, this statement is only very partially true. In so far as there was any sectarian pact at all, it was made between Coleridge and Wordsworth in the west country in 1797–8, when *Lyrical Ballads* came into being; and we know to what a very small extent, after all, even *Lyrical Ballads* was a party-manifesto. Between 1795 and 1803 Southey was working on wholly independent lines, and far from the theories to be unfolded in Wordsworth's Prefaces and in *Biographia Literaria.* He made two journeys to Portugal, which had a decisive influence on his genius, giving colour to his fancy, disposing him to Spanish and Portuguese learning, and opening a rich and unworked vein to his wonderful literary industry. He was producing poetry during those years, more assiduously and abundantly than Wordsworth and Coleridge, and with quite as much enthusiasm, though with different inspiration. Four practical enterprises belong to that

time : a long epic called *Joan of Arc ;* a mass of short miscellaneous ballads, metrical tales and eclogues ; the romantic narrative poem called *Thalaba the Destroyer*, published in 1801 ; and the equally romantic *Madoc*, written before *Thalaba*, though not published until 1805. Through *Joan of Arc*, conceived and partly written while Southey was still a Balliol undergraduate, at the time, that is, when he was closely associated with Coleridge, he came nearest, perhaps, to enrolment in the new brotherhood of song. Coleridge was not only deeply interested in the venture, but himself contributed to its pages a long insertion in the second book, afterwards withdrawn, and republished as *The Destiny of Nations*. Charles Lamb, who, if the world had not appropriated him, might be claimed as the great critic among the brotherhood, hailed Southey's first epic with a shout which we can still hear. Writing to Coleridge in the summer of 1796 he says, "With *Joan of Arc* I have been delighted, amazed. . . . Why, the poem is alone sufficient to redeem the character of the age we live in from the imputation of degenerating in Poetry, were there no such beings extant as Burns [it was a month before Burns's death] and Bowles, Cowper, and —— ; fill up the blank how you please; I say nothing. . . . On the whole, I expect Southey one day to rival Milton : I already deem him equal to Cowper, and superior to all living poets besides." If we ignore chronology, and reflect on where Southey stands now in the temple of fame, we shall be disposed to find a sly jest in the last sentence. But there is no jest about it ; there were no *Lyrical Ballads* as yet, no *Ancient Mariner*, and no *Christabel*, and Lamb meant every word he said. And indeed *Joan* made an epoch ; it is a spirited narrative poem, of almost epic dimensions—really the first serious epic since *Paradise Regained ;* on a noble theme and written in correct and spirited blank verse. How could even Charles Lamb know just what was going to happen, and how the currents were to set ?

Southey's preface to *Joan of Arc* shows all the brisk self-consciousness of the innovator or restorer. Not less interesting in their promise and animation were some of the shorter poems which he was composing while Wordsworth and Coleridge were busy in the Quantocks. These show a clear, but distant, cousinly relationship to the *Lyrical Ballads* and their like.

First, there are the ballads, of some of which, and especially of *The Battle of Blenheim* and *Mary, the Maid of the Inn*, one is tired of hearing that they are the only things of Southey's that live. They are, indeed, excellent specimens of the balladist's art, rapid and interesting in narrative movement, clear in meaning, fascinating in metre, touched here and there with true pathos, true horror, and true humour. Many of them, *e.g. The Old Woman of Berkeley*, are, of course, artificial, they are imitations of an old form, rather than like the *Ancient Mariner* or *Christabel*, new creations in a restored form. None of them is imaginative in the sense in which Coleridge and Wordsworth intended to be imaginative in their joint endeavours. Yet their simplicity, their lucidity, their vivacity, their first-rate style make them worthy instances of Romanticism, in so far as Romanticism means the restoration to poetry of spontaneity, of simplicity, of "natural" as opposed to "poetic" diction.

One section of Southey's miscellaneous poems, the *English Eclogues*, stand in a class by themselves. They are an experiment, deliberately and self-consciously made, in imitation of German models, and in a form which Southey believed to be without precedent in English. They are a contribution to pastoral poetry in the widest sense of that comprehensive term —poetry, that is, like the Bucolics of Virgil, expressed in the *ipsissima verba* of simple folk talking among themselves about the simple concerns of a country neighbourhood. In these attempts of Southey's the cousinly likeness to Wordsworthianism is very marked. They are not very successful, for much the same reason, perhaps, that Wordsworth was not always successful; simplicity is pursued at the expense, sometimes, of the dignity and beauty without which verse is not poetry.

> "When the Doctor sent him
> Abroad to try the air, it made me certain
> That all was over. There's but little hope,
> Methinks, that foreign parts can help a man
> When his own mother-country will not do."

There is a great deal of this kind of thing in Southey's Eclogues. Yet Charles Lamb liked some of them "mightily," for their "pictures" and "realities." The last word, we feel, is well chosen. It is by their realism that they count; and realism was one of the triumphs of the Romantic Revival.

For high success in the pure lyric of self-revelation and self-relief, Southey had not enough tenderness, not enough humanity. Nor, though he was a master of expression in verse, and had a fine gift of phrasing, had he the unfailing taste and felicity which such poetry requires. Thus, in *The Dead Friend*, a lyric which just falls short of being beautiful, and yet has no throb of real pain, the same poet who writes—

> "Not to the grave, not to the grave, my soul,
> Follow thy friend beloved,
> The spirit is not there!"

which is at least as good as Longfellow at his best, is capable of writing—

> "How sweet it were with powers
> Such as the Cherubim
> To view the depth of Heaven!"

which even Longfellow would hardly have allowed himself to put down.

The *Edinburgh Review*, then, misconceived Southey when it made him the champion and apostle of the Lake School in so far as that school consisted of Wordsworth and Coleridge, co-operating for the reform of English poetry. In 1809, Byron entered the field of the poetry and criticism of the Romantic Revival with his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Two years before he had published his juvenile *Hours of Idleness*, and had been soundly punished for it by the *Edinburgh*. *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* was his rejoinder; and a very interesting rejoinder it is. Throughout his clever satire, Byron, with the egotistic malevolence which always haunted him, runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds. Himself a true product of Romanticism, he attacks the best phases of Romanticism with all Jeffrey's aversion and a thousand times Jeffrey's spite. First of all, Walter Scott, who yielded afterwards with such sweet grace to the glaringly popular Byron of *Childe Harold*, Scott, whose *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Marmion* will be read and loved, we may safely predict, long after the *Giaour* and *Lara* are forgotten, is consigned to *limbo*. This is how Byron treats the noble *Marmion*—

> "Next view in state, proud prancing on his roan,
> The golden-crested haughty Marmion,

Now forging scrolls, now foremost in the fight
Not quite a felon, yet but half a knight,
The gibbet or the field prepared to grace ;
A mighty mixture of the great and base.
And think'st thou, Scott ! by vain conceit perchance,
On public taste to foist thy stale romance ?
. . . . . .
No ! when the sons of song descend to trade,
Their bays are sear, their former laurels fade.
Let such forgo the poet's sacred name,
Who rack their brains for lucre, not for fame ;
Still for stern Mammon may they toil in vain !
And sadly gaze on gold they cannot gain !
. . . . . .
For this we spurn Apollo's venal son,
And bid a long 'good night to Marmion.'"

Then comes Southey's turn. He is a "ballad-monger," who pours forth spurious epics, which claim to be on a level with the work of Homer, Virgil, Milton, and Tasso. Thalaba, as a hero, is the rival of Tom Thumb. *Madoc* is a tissue of travellers' tales. Byron deprecates the coming *Curse of Kehama*, in which Southey's poetic power culminated—

"Oh ! Southey ! Southey ! cease thy varied song !
A bard may chant too often and too long :
As thou art strong in verse, in mercy spare !
A fourth, alas ! were more than we could bear.
But if, in spite of all the world can say,
Thou still wilt verseward plod thy weary way ;
If still in Berkeley ballads most uncivil,
Thou wilt devote old women to the devil,
The babe unborn thy dread intent may rue;
God help thee, Southey, and thy readers too."

In 1813, Southey was made Poet Laureate, his only rival being Scott, who, of course, worked for Southey rather than for himself. His success in this respect did not sweeten towards him the jealous soul of Byron. In 1818, Byron dedicated to the Laureate the first instalment of *Don Juan*. He still regarded Southey as a "Laker," and lumped him up with Coleridge and Wordsworth in the old uncritical way—

"And now, my Epic Renegade ! what are ye at ?
With all the Lakers, in and out of place ?
A nest of tuneful persons, to my eye
Like four-and-twenty blackbirds in a pye."

"You—Gentlemen! by dint of long seclusion
From better company, have kept your own
At Keswick, and, through still continued fusion
Of one another's minds, at last have grown
To deem, as a most logical conclusion,
That Poesy has wreaths for you alone;
There is a narrowness in such a notion,
Which makes me wish you'd change your lakes for ocean."

Coleridge knew better; and he, at least, was a great critic, with no envy in his heart. In his *Biographia Literaria* he finds in their treatment of Southey one of the chief condemnations of the critics. He ridicules the notion that the Lakists were in any real sense a mutual admiration society. He shows that the critics condemned Southey by the easy process, before which no poetry could stand, of exhibiting its weaker sides only. "He who tells me that there are defects in a new work, tells me nothing which I should not have taken for granted without his information. But he who points out and elucidates the *beauties* of an original work, does indeed give me interesting information, such as experience would not have authorized me in anticipating." The latter was by no means the method of Jeffrey and the rest. What should we have learned from them of "the pastoral claims and wild streaming lights of *Thalaba*," of the "full blaze of the *Kehama* (a gallery of finished pictures in one splendid fancy piece, in which, notwithstanding, the moral grandeur rises gradually above the brilliance of the colouring and the boldness and novelty of the machinery);" the "more sober beauties" of *Madoc;* what of the *Roderick*, "in which, retaining all his former excellencies of a poet eminently inventive and picturesque, he has surpassed himself in language and metre, in the construction of the whole, and in the splendour of particular passages"? Such is Coleridge's estimate; in which it is impossible not to feel some of the generous overpraise of kindness. But he arrives at a general conclusion which twentieth-century readers of Southey will be slow to quarrel with. "His prose is always intelligible and always entertaining. In poetry he has attempted almost every species of composition known before, and he has added new ones; and if we except the highest lyric (in which how few, how very few even of the greatest minds have been fortunate), he has attempted every species successfully."

Men of high intelligence in a later generation, men like Cardinal Newman and Dean Stanley, knew the worth of Southey's poetry; and even Carlyle knew it, though he was wont to praise his verse-making contemporaries with a grudge. But it remained the correct thing to dispraise Southey. When Macaulay brought up his tremendous reinforcements to the *Edinburgh*, he had occasion to review there Southey's *Colloquies* in 1830. Southey's *Colloquies* concern social and political matters; and in 1830 Southey was a tenacious and uncompromising Tory, while Macaulay was alive with the Whiggism which was to carry the first Reform Bill. His quarrel with Southey is therefore only partly literary; and, indeed, when he comes face to face with the characterization of his poetry, he has to mingle praise with blame and honour with contempt. "His longer poems, though full of faults, are nevertheless very extraordinary productions. We doubt greatly whether they will be read fifty years hence; but that, if they are read, they will be admired, we have no doubt whatever."

There are many points of resemblance between the literary careers of Southey and Walter Scott. Both men were prodigies of literary industry and miscellaneous literary ability. Both were laid hold of in youth by the fires of the Romantic movement; both won their first reputation as brilliant poets; both were *Quarterly Reviewers;* both forsook poetry for prose. The differences between the men help us to understand Southey's comparative failure. So far as the mere management of prose, the mere general mechanism of expression, is concerned, Southey was a much better writer than Scott. His English is much more terse, more nervous, more oligosyllabic, than Scott's. But this superiority, as we know, is but dust in the balance compared with Scott's achievement as a writer of fiction, by virtue of which he sits for ever in the front rank on a golden throne. "All is great in the Waverley Novels," said Goethe; "material, effects, characters, execution;" and in the sense of such greatness, the sense of Scott's deficiencies in style disappears, and we see how low is Southey's stature beside his. In poetry the disparity is less great. Both Southey and Scott are in a rank below the highest in nineteenth-century poetry; this was maintained, much too emphatically, in their lifetime; it is amply recognized still. Both were narrative poets; both

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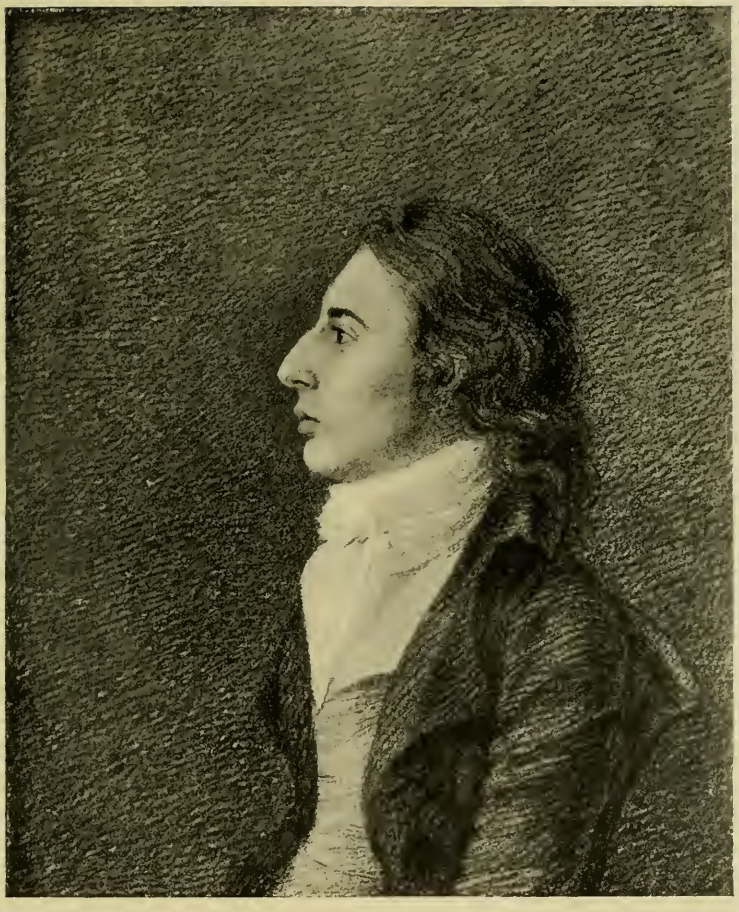
were successful balladists; both were poets of romantic incident. In many respects Scott's poetry is inferior to Southey's: it shows less metrical and stylistic resource; it is much less learned, less complex, less artistic. Yet for those very reasons it was more popular when it appeared, and for those reasons it still lives, while Southey's needs to be revived. Its life lies in its spontaneity, its simplicity, its gush and flow, its reliance on the essential, and sempiternal interest of romance. In a word it is human and natural poetry, while Southey's is, to a large extent, preterhuman and artificial.

And indeed the deficiency of Southey's poetry was also a deficiency of his personality—a deficiency in the human and natural. Through excellent portraits and ample autobiographical and biographical evidence, we can reach that personality, and get to pretty close quarters with it. Let us try to do so now.

A tall spare man, with dark complexion, dark curling hair, and the hazel eyes which so often go with that colouring, is, by general consent, the Southey of authentic portraits and contemporary descriptions. A bold fine face it must have been, striking rather than winning, with strongly pencilled eyebrows, aquiline nose, and full lips, the eyes keen, not sweet, and the head habitually carried high, with the chin forwards. It would be difficult to imagine a physiognomy more unlike that of his house-mate, Coleridge, with his "heaven-eyes" and flabby irresoluteness of mien. Southey's manner seems to have impressed observers by its combination of agreeableness and reserve. Two acute critics and picturesque describers of personality, De Quincey and Carlyle, have transmitted their impressions. De Quincey first saw him at Greta Hall, in 1807, when Southey had not been many years settled there, and was thirty-three. De Quincey, like all men and women who wield picturesque pens, was apt to detract, even in describing his heroes; but he does not write detractingly of Southey. The carriage of his head suggested to De Quincey that he contemplated abstractions, and was an aspiring man. There was "a serene and gentle pride" in his face, chastened by manifest modesty and reverence. His bearing was courteous; and yet he was hardly genial. "The point in which Southey's manner failed the most in conciliating regard, was, perhaps, in what related to the external expressions of friendliness. . . . There was an air



ROBERT SOUTHEY IN 1798

FROM THE DRAWING BY HANCOCK IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

of distance and reserve about him—the reserve of a lofty, self-respecting mind, but, perhaps, a little too freezing, in his treatment of all persons who were not amongst the *corps* of his ancient fireside friends." Nothing in later and frequent intercourse changed De Quincey's first impression of Southey. There remained the sense of his amiability and serenity; of his rectitude, of his courtesy in speech, and gentleness in judgment; and there remained also the sense of chilling reserve. There remained, above all, the sense of his extraordinary *bookishness*, his literary industry and literary preoccupation. Although De Quincey, in personal intercourse, thought him, in some respects, Wordsworth's moral superior, less monopolizing in conversation, less self-complacent and intolerant, more charitable, considerate, and chivalrous, he felt that the bookishness of his interests and talk made him a less comfortable companion. His library, De Quincey alleged, was his wife, his true love which had his heart. Besides, he was not so expansive a talker as Wordsworth; he was more epigrammatic, more aphoristic, and therefore apt to make his interlocutor often feel that the conversational account was closed.

Carlyle's record of Southey is more interesting than De Quincey's. His praise is quite as cordial; and somewhat rare was Carlyle's cordial praise of a contemporary, especially a contemporary man of letters. His gift for character-sketching was greater and more fascinating than De Quincey's. De Quincey, too, as himself a Lakist, might be expected to be hampered, in writing about a Lake poet, by some of the trammels of artificial brotherhood. But Carlyle's representations in this matter, were wholly "without prejudice," except that it was his cue to belittle all versifiers of his own day.

Carlyle first encountered Southey in the early days of his London life in the thirties, before and after his *French Revolution* came out, when Southey was in his sixties, and nearing the end of the journey. The two men met at the house of Henry Taylor, author of *Philip Van Artevelde*, that noble link between two generations of English letters. Carlyle was doubly interested in Southey. As a young Radical, he had sympathized in the outcry against the poet as a renegade from his early republican principles. Later, when that phase of opinion had passed away for ever, Carlyle got to know Southey's poetry, and to think of

it with the admiration it deserves. "I much recognize," wrote Carlyle in his delightful idiom, "the piety, the gentle deep affection, the reverence for God and man, which reigned in these pieces: full of soft pity, like the wailings of a mother, and yet with a clang of chivalrous valour finely audible too." Carlyle went to Henry Taylor's in the evening, when he and Southey had finished a *tête-à-tête* dinner, and were taking their wine in a ground-floor room "somewhere near Downing Street, and looking into St. James's Park." "Southey was a man towards well up in the fifties [he must have been really over sixty]; hair grey, not yet hoary, well setting off his fine clear brown complexion; head and face both smallish, as indeed the figure was while seated; features finely cut; eyes, brow, mouth good in their kind—expressive all, and even vehemently so, but betokening rather keenness than depth either of intellect or character; a serious, human, honest, but sharp almost fierce-looking thin man, with very much of the militant in his aspect,—in the eyes especially was visible a mixture of sorrow and of anger, or of angry contempt, as if his indignant fight with the world had not yet ended in victory, but also never should [*sic*] in defeat." In the course of this first conversation Southey quoted Praed—a fact which Carlyle (whom Praed had not the good fortune to please) thought "tragic." When Southey rose from his chair, Carlyle first realized that he was tall. He was "all legs, in shape and stature like a pair of tongs." Subsequent meetings and conversations made Carlyle like Southey more and more; and he was especially gratified by his unexpected approval of his *French Revolution*. In those later talks Carlyle noticed Southey's careworn anxious look, and how his eyes "were as if filled with gloomy bewilderment and incurable sorrows." Once he called on Carlyle at Cheyne Row—Miss Isabella Fenwick (of whom we shall hear later as a friend of Wordsworth), a connection of Sir Henry Taylor, and very fond of men of letters, coming with him. It was an unfortunate moment for a dignified visit; Mrs. Carlyle was marmalade-making over the parlour fire, which was "brisker" than that in the kitchen, when suddenly the big brass pan boiled over, and the chimney caught fire in the blaze. We can fancy the scene: Mrs. Carlyle heroically snatching the pan off the fire, and Carlyle himself, hastily summoned from his writing-table, "letting down the grate valve,

and cutting quite off the supply of oxygen or atmosphere," when there sounded, with a voice of thunder, Southey's and Miss Fenwick's knock at the street door! Carlyle remembered "how daintily" his wife "made the salutations, brief quizzical bit of explanation, got the wreck to vanish; and sat down as member of our little party." The two men talked of Shelley, with a great deal of admirable morality at his expense, but apparently concurring in a total lack of insight into his intellectual and literary worth.

One final interview there was, *tête-à-tête* in the evening, at Henry Taylor's. They sat on a sofa, and bewailed the strides of democracy, persuading themselves apparently that they—the sombre, conventional Tory and the paradoxical, hero-worshipping humorist, Radical, essentially, in every fibre—had the same point of view. Then they exchanged their last farewell.

It is impossible to resist quoting almost *verbatim* Carlyle's summing-up of Southey: "I used to construe him to myself as a man of slight build, but of sound and elegant; with considerable genius in him, considerable faculty of speech and rhythmic insight, and with a morality that shone distinguished among his contemporaries." Carlyle had noticed how the colour came and went on Southey's dark face. "I reckoned him (with those blue blushes and those red) to be the perhaps excitablest of all men; and that a deep mute monition of conscience had spoken to him, 'You are capable of running mad, if you don't take care. Acquire habitudes; stick firm as adamant to them at all times, and work, continually work!' This, for thirty or forty years, he had punctually and impetuously done; no man so habitual, we were told; gave up his poetry at a given hour, on stroke of the clock, and took to prose, etc., etc.; and, as to diligence and velocity, employed his very walking hours, walked with a book in his hand; and by these methods of his, had got through perhaps a greater amount of work, counting quantity and quality, than any other man whatever in those years of his; till all suddenly ended. I likened him to one of those huge sandstone grinding cylinders which I had seen at Manchester, turning with inconceivable velocity. . . . screaming harshly, and shooting out each of them its sheet of fire . . . beautiful sheets of fire . . . when you look from rearward. For many years these stones grind so, at such a rate, till at last (in some cases)

comes a moment when the stone's cohesion is quite worn out, overcome by the stupendous velocity long continued ; and while grinding its fastest, it flies off altogether, and settles some yards from you, a grinding-stone no longer, but a cartload of quiet sand."

There can be no doubt that much in this bright sketch is true to the real Southey, and it is in full agreement with the lazy traditional second or third hand estimate of him. Yet it does not satisfy the inquirer. The mere regularity, for example ; why should it always be quoted as being vaguely to Southey's discredit ? There is, after all, no demerit in stopping one's work when the clock strikes, even if the work should chance to be poetry. It is not self-evident that poetry ought to be composed in a trance or amid chaos. The implication, of course, is that Southey's output was inferior ; that the incessant grinding, the monotonous regularity, produced nothing equivalent to the effort. But inferiority is relative ; it was not easy to be the contemporary of Wordsworth and Coleridge. There is always some absurdity in being Poet Laureate when other men are producing immeasurably better poetry than you are yourself. But it is nothing to posterity that Southey happened to be Laureate ; what posterity wants is to ascertain his absolute rank.

Carlyle's version of Southey's industry, at all events, is true. Southey's characteristic life and life-work began with his settlement at Greta Hall in 1803, when he was thirty. It was just nine years since the romantic revolutionary had made Coleridge's acquaintance at Oxford ; just eight since he and Coleridge had married respectively Edith and Sarah Fricker at Bristol. His youth was over ; his intellectual wild oats were sown ; Portugal and things Portuguese and Spanish had made their mark on him ; he was apart, he was dedicated, pledged, to the literary life, pure and simple. Therefore, when Coleridge, who had made Greta Hall at least his wife's home, asked the Southeys to come and share the quiet mansion on its knoll under Skiddaw, and in sound of Greta and Derwent, Southey felt that the call must be obeyed. It was indeed a potent call ! For, once settled at Greta Hall, Southey never left it until he was carried, forty years after, to his grave in Crosthwaite churchyard, hardly a mile off.

Those were the forty years of the industry which has

become a proverb. "Imagine me," he wrote once, "in this great study of mine from breakfast till dinner, from dinner till tea, and from tea till supper, in my old black coat, my corduroys alternately with the long worsted pantaloons and gaiters in one, and the green shade, and sitting at my desk, and you have my picture and my history." It was never different. All that has to be added is the leisurely walk in fine weather, book in hand, always with full enjoyment of the scenery. "I have seen a sight," he wrote in February, 1804, "more dreamy and wonderful than fancy ever yet devised for fairyland. We had walked down to the lake side; it was a delightful day, the sun shining, and a few white clouds hanging motionless in the sky. . . . The surface of the lake was so perfectly still, that it became one great mirror and all its waters disappeared. . . . As I stood on the shore, heaven and the clouds seemed lying under me; I was looking down into the sky . . . it seemed like an abyss of sky before me, not fog and clouds from a mountain, but the blue heaven spotted with a few fleecy pillows of cloud, that looked placed there for angels to rest upon them." In such things Southey took daily delight.

If Southey's library was his wife; though he loved books with such devotion that when, before the end, the power of reading forsook him, he would take down his volumes from the shelves and kiss them, we must not forget that he was a domestic man in the fullest sense of the word. He was twice married; he had children of his own, through whom he had keen happiness and keen pain; and the Coleridges, Hartley, Derwent, and Sara, spent their childhood and youth at Greta Hall. Southey's letters, not letters of genius like Charles Lamb's, and without the delicate flavour and odour of Cowper's, show, with a perfect transparency, the depths of a life as happy in its play as it was strenuous in its industry, and faultless in its regularity. Southey's humour was hardly so abundant as to overflow into his writings; but it was genuine enough to make his home a happy place for his children, and even for himself. Southey was not a constitutionally happy man. Carlyle noticed the sorrow and anger in his eyes, and the shiftings of colour on his face even on the threshold of old age; and he shrewdly reckoned that behind and beneath the chill reserve

of manner, perilously unstable nerves were on the tremble. Throughout his life Southey suffered the drawbacks of a neurotic temperament. In his youth he had dreams, unfed with any opium, which were almost worthy to rank with De Quincey's; and which help to explain the unearthly scenery and metrical excitements of *Thalaba*. He had an ever recurring fight with "hay-fever," and other indications of nervous weakness. Yet in his incessant toil and cheerful family-life, set in the midst of scenery so exquisite, he found such happiness as his nature could feel. At fifty-one he could say, "my literary employments have never, in the slightest degree, injured my health." He denied that he had ever been a close student, in any unwholesome sense of the words. There was nothing irksome or anxious in his work, carried on as it was so far from the central machinery; he was master, he said, of his time and of himself. If the daily walk was ever intermitted it was not from indisposition for exercise, and it was very seldom. He loved it; and in winter would often take it with some of his young folks before breakfast, "for the sake of getting the first sunshine on the mountains." His mild humour found an outlet in a love of cats and kittens. In his sixtieth year he could write to a contemporary: "Alas, Grosvenor, this day poor old Rumpel was found dead, after as long and happy a life as cat could wish for, if cats form wishes on that subject. His full titles were:—'The Most Noble the Archduke Rumpelstiltzchen, Earl Tomlemagne, Baron Raticide, Waowhler, and Skaratch.' There should be a court mourning in Catland. . . . As we have no catacombs here, he is to be decently interred in the orchard, and cat-mint planted on his grave."

Southey had to bear the anguish of losing two children, a son and daughter, and of having to put away his first wife, as a mental invalid, from his home. Long before those things happened, he felt the sombreness of advancing life. At forty he was talking like an old man, about the sere and yellow leaf, and the decline of his poetic powers. Yet we cannot avoid the conclusion that he was predominantly happy. "When I cease to be cheerful," he said of himself when he was thirty-two, "it is only to become contemplative, to feel at times a wish that I was in that state of existence which passes not away; and this always ends in a new impulse to proceed."

Those who think about Southey at all seem to have made up their minds that he was more eminent as a prose-writer than as a poet. Yet this judgment apparently rests on little besides the fact that his excellent lives of Nelson and Wesley are well written, still readable, and often reprinted; while his poetry, except one or two ballads and lyrics, is hardly known. As a matter of fact, however, the great bulk of Southey's prose —the main product of those years of portentous industry,— lies in a darker limbo than that which hides his verse. It falls into three classes, with each of which time has dealt unkindly. In the first are the laborious histories, the *History of Brazil* and the *History of the Peninsular War*, which are entirely forgotten. The *History of Portugal*, which was to be exhaustive and epoch-making, was never finished. In the second class are the innumerable contributions to the *Quarterly Review* and other periodicals; reviews literary, political, ecclesiastical, economic; articles of admirable learning, excellent judgment, faultless morals, and unbending conservatism, which have no message for posterity. Into the third class fall Southey's chief efforts at imaginative and humorous prose, the *Colloquies on Society*, and that interminable *farrago*, *The Doctor*. The former, one may predict, will be remembered as long as Macaulay's essays are read, and no longer. *The Doctor* is dead for want of humour, where humour alone could preserve life.

After all, then, it would seem that it is by his poetry that Southey must live if he is to live at all. There is, sometimes, a possible resurrection for poetry, when there is none for prose. Can Southey's rise again?

That the chief part of it—those poems to the making of which there went so much pathetic devotion, so much genuine inspiration,—has the look of death, there is no doubt. And no wonder! For, in the first place, they are narrative poems, and very long; and for such poetry the chance of immortality is very precarious. If narrative poetry attains to epic rank, if it is poetry like the *Æneid*, *Paradise Lost*, even *The Faerie Queene*, its immortality will depend on its workmanship: the dignity, the interest, of its themes, is not likely ever to suffer loss. But where epic rank is wanting, where the narrative lacks the religious or historico-traditional basis of true epic, where it depends for its interest on purely human incident and character, varied, perhaps, by

some preternatural by-play, or recommended by great novelty of subject, the chance of life is much more doubtful. And the doubt increases with the length of the poem. Length is in itself a drawback, a stumbling-block, even to the keen lover of poetry, much more to the average reader of it. And this for a profound reason. Poetry cannot be enjoyed as it ought to be enjoyed, any more than it can be made, without excitement; and excitement, if it is to be pleasurable and beneficial, must not be unduly protracted. It is the difficulty in narrative poetry of maintaining emotion at the pitch necessary for poetic success, whether for the poet or his reader, which explains the small proportion of extended narrative poetry to be found among classics that are loved. The lyric with its inevitableness, its brevity; the drama, with its intensity and its conventional limitations, are the more natural vehicles of inspiration, the surer messengers between heart and heart.

True, narrative poetry never had a better opportunity than in the days of the Romantic Revival, and especially before 1814, when the Waverley Novels began to be poured forth. The imaginative sympathies of the public were astir, and there was as yet no wealth of prose fiction to gratify them. The taste for didactic and argumentative poetry had died away. There was an opening for narrative poetry, for fiction in verse; and poetry of that kind, admirable and dazzlingly popular poetry, was produced abundantly. The popularity of Scott's poetry in this kind was only eclipsed by the popularity of Byron's. Readers who would now spend hours over novels, spent hours over *Marmion*, *Lara*, and *The Bride of Abydos*.

Neither Scott nor Byron is dead; but Byron's purely narrative poetry has but a faint pulse; and Scott, as a poet, is far from being to us what he was to our forefathers. Still, *The Lady of the Lake* and *Marmion* will always, we may believe, find delighted readers, because of Scott's admirable mastery of the metres he used, and because of the deep roots struck by those poems into national scenery and life. They are not far from the epic place.

Southey had definite aims in poetry, and he aimed with intelligence and skill. He made his plans in his revolutionary boyhood, in entire freedom from "classical" tradition. Romantic mediævalism laid hold of him; his most juvenile ambition was

to complete the *Faerie Queene.* His lyrical and idyllic and balladist's efforts were episodic and occasional ; he meant to be an epic poet, and he succeeded in being at least a narrative one. For him poetry was to be no recreation from the labours of learning, no water of Lethe in which the student might forget himself. On the contrary, it was to be one aspect of the most recondite learning ; he was to make a series of epics on the great mythologies of the world. Such was the ideal : the realization is in *Thalaba* and *The Curse of Kehama.* Southey modestly repudiated all comparison with Milton ; but he quite soberly ranked himself with Tasso, with Virgil, with Homer. Yet, with such grandiose conceptions and ambitious self-judgment, he had a keen sense, born of the new criticism, of the inadmissibility, in the best poetry, of grandiosity in expression ; of pompous diction, rhetoric, elaborate ornamentation. The heroic in poetry meant, in Southey's estimation, no abnegation of spontaneity, simplicity, and passion. "That poetry," he said once (and he was speaking of heroic narrative), "which would reach the heart, must go straight to the mark like an arrow. Away with all trickery and ornaments when pure beauty is to be represented . . . away with drapery when you would display muscular strength." "I am a Puritan in language," he asserted when he was writing *Madoc.* He would not luxuriate in archaisms ; learned as he was, he kept the impulse to neologize sternly in check. Yet he had the true romantic belief in novelty as essential to poetic success.

Southey's method of attaining novelty was twofold : by strangeness of theme on the one hand, and careful metrical skill on the other. Only in *Thalaba* and *Kehama,* where the twofold method is fully employed, does Southey realize himself as a poet. His long blank verse poems, *Madoc, Roderick,* and others, were much admired by his contemporaries ; they are still readable when the reader has a great deal of leisure, and has nothing else to read. But the curse of mere narrative poetry is on them, and they are too undistinguished to be everlasting. It is by the combination, in *Thalaba* and *Kehama,* of sheer outlandishness of theme with lucid refined expression and fascinating metrical movement, that Southey lives and deserves to live. Both parts of the combination are essential. Without the distinction of style the strangeness of theme would

have been a fatal stumbling-block; to popularity it was a hindrance even as it was. Readers could stand the picturesque orientalism of Byron and Moore, but the learned orientalism of Southey was too strong for them. Charles Lamb gave voice to a great deal of contemporary criticism when he wrote as he did of *Kehama*. "My imagination goes sinking and floundering in the vast spaces of unopened-before systems and faiths; I am put out of the pale of my old sympathies; my moral sense is almost outraged . . . . Jove, and his brotherhood of gods, tottering with the giant assailings, I can bear, for the soul's hopes are not struck at in such contests; but your Oriental almighties are too much types of the intangible prototype to be meddled with without shuddering." Yet what attractiveness there is in the scenery, and in the beings, human and preter-human, that flit across it! How in *Thalaba* we are soothed by the vast desert solitudes; how in *Kehama* we breathe the heavy sweet air of Hindostan!

But it is true that we could not stand much of either if we were not detained by the style. As to style in general, whether in prose or verse, Southey held what is the best practical conviction about it, namely, that one ought to express one's self as perspicuously, concisely, and impressively as possible, and otherwise think about the matter not at all. But about metres he thought very much, and in *Thalaba* and *Kehama* he attained to a diction which poets seldom achieve without much artistic self-consciousness. The rhymelessness of *Thalaba* (which Southey borrowed from the Norwich poet, Sayers), and its rhythmical originality are potent to overcome the drawbacks of its length and the abstruseness of its theme, to make it the interesting reading which it undoubtedly is. For the emphasis of rhyme Southey substitutes another emphasis, that of the repetition of phrase which every reader of *Thalaba* knows so well—

> "Who at this untimely hour
> Wanders o'er the desert sands?
> No station is in view,
> Nor palm-grove, islanded amid the waste.
> The mother and her child,
> The widow'd mother and the fatherless boy,
> *They at this untimely hour*
> *Wander o'er the desert sands.*"

The delicacy and careful simplicity of Southey's diction is very unlike the rhetorical tumidity of most second-rate poets—

"But then the wrinkling smile
Forsook Mohareb's cheek,
And darker feelings settled on his brow.
'Now by my soul,' quoth he, 'and I believe,
Idiot! that I have led
Some camel-knee'd prayer-monger through the cave!
What brings thee hither? Thou shouldst have a hut
By some Saint's grave beside the public way,
There to less-knowing fools
Retail thy Koran-scraps,
And in thy turn die civet-like at last,
In the dung-perfume of thy sanctity!'"

Tennyson might have written the last four lines.

The rapid narrative movement, the enchanting clearness of detail which we feel in *The Ancient Mariner*, are not wanting here—

"All waste! no sign of life
But the track of the wolf and the bear!
No sound but the wild, wild wind,
And the snow crunching under his feet!
Night is come; neither moon nor stars,
Only the light of the snow!
But behold a fire in the cave of the hill,
A heart-reviving fire;
And thither with strength renew'd
Thalaba presses on.

He found a Woman in the cave,
A solitary Woman,
Who by the fire was spinning,
And singing as she spun.
The pine boughs were cheerfully blazing,
And her face was bright with the flame;
Her face was as a Damsel's face,
And yet her hair was grey.
She bade him welcome with a smile,
And still continued spinning,
And singing as she spun.
. . . . . .
The thread she spun it gleam'd like gold
In the light of the odorous fire,
Yet was it so wondrously thin,
That, save when it shone in the light,
You might look for it closely in vain.

The youth sate watching it,
And she observed his wonder,
And then again she spake,
And still her speech was song;
Now twine it round thy hands I say,
Now twine it round thy hands I pray!
My thread is small, my thread is fine,
But he must be
A stronger than thee
Who can break this thread of mine!"

Nor, in the phantasmagoria of the preternatural, is the natural thrill never felt. Even the magic "Green Bird of Paradise" falls short of the magic that is abroad in an English spring—

"Her voice was soft and sweet,
It rose not with the blackbird's thrill,
Nor warbled like that dearest bird that holds
The solitary man
A loiterer in his thoughtful walk at eve."

Nothing, certainly, but clarity of style and metrical resource could make the reader feel at home among the outlandish complications of *Kehama*. And yet those gifts are so conspicuous, and the narrative is made so beguiling by its constant breaks, that the reader who begins the poem fairly will hardly wish to stop before he has finished it. If the human interest is slight, the adventures are most winningly described—

"Behold them wandering on their hopeless way,
Unknowing where they stray,
Yet sure where'er they stop to find no rest.
The evening gale is blowing,
It plays among the trees;
Like plumes upon a warrior's crest,
They see yon cocos tossing to the breeze.
Ladurlad views them with impatient mind,
Impatiently he hears
The gale of evening blowing,
The sound of waters flowing,
As if all sights and sounds combined
To mock his irremediable woe;
For not for him the blessed waters flow,
For not for him the gales of evening blow,
A fire is in his heart and brain,
And Nature hath no healing for his pain."

Wordsworth hit on a good criticism of Southey when he complained of his lack of *ideality*. In composing a poem, Wordsworth said, Southey was content with choosing a subject, and then reading up about it carefully: he did not, as the great poet must, conceive and passionately hold fast a central *idea* of which the poem is the exposition. Hence he failed "to give anything which impresses the mind strongly, and is recollected in solitude."

This is true, and it is final. Southey's best poetry is thoroughly *good*, nay, in a sense it is first-rate, the cunning admirable work of a thoroughly competent craftsman; and, as such, it ought never to be deposed from the high place which by right it holds in English literature. But it is poetry of erudition and skill, not poetry of passion or prophecy. It is the work of one neither intoxicated with the beauty of things, nor testifying of those supreme realities in which the beautiful and the true are indistinguishable. And therefore all the labour has an inadequate result. Southey gave nothing "which impresses the mind strongly, and is recollected in solitude."

The two principal achievements of Southey as Laureate, the *Carmen Nuptiale* on the marriage of Princess Charlotte, and the unlucky *Vision of Judgment* on the death of George III., add nothing to his best reputation. Yet the scorn which they provoked at the time was political rather than literary. Hazlitt brought down a quite disproportionately heavy mass of disapprobation on the *Carmen Nuptiale*, not because the poem was bad, but because Southey, the renegade republican, was now a court official. The same feeling, mixed with personal jealousy and resentment, inspired Byron's reply to *The Vision of Judgment*. The *Vision* is, as poetry, as bad as Southey's worst enemy could have desired: it is an attempt, in bad hexameters, at the Dantesque sublime, which, for sheer lack of humour and impotence of imagination, bears off the palm, even among such *pièces de circonstance*. Byron might have spared himself the trouble of writing his counter-*Vision*, which, as poetry, is not much better than Southey's, and is, in effect, hardly more blasphemous. But in the preface to his *Vision*, Southey had attacked Byron, without naming him, as the founder of a "Satanic school" of poetry (he was thinking of *Beppo* and the early part of *Don Juan*); and it was in self-defence, as much as

in virtuous condemnation of George III., that Byron lashed out with his sting.

Some strong literary friendships added to the happiness of Southey's life. The friendship with Coleridge was spoiled by the family complications. That with Charles Lamb tended towards a kind of death by slow petrifaction. De Quincey Southey came to dislike actively as time went on. His intellectual sympathies were with a different type among his contemporaries, and especially with Walter Savage Landor and Sir Henry Taylor.

To Wordsworth Southey was splendidly and consistently loyal. For constant intercourse they were rather inconveniently situated: they were too near to correspond by letter, and too far apart, and Southey was too busy, for even such excellent pedestrians to meet constantly. There seems never to have been any cloud between the two men. There were, no doubt, certain influences which made for estrangement. As long as Coleridge was in the Lake country at all, he hung upon the Wordsworths, and Southey, at Greta Hall, was identified with the opposite camp, that composed of Mrs. Coleridge and the children. Against increasing warmth of friendship there worked temperament: Wordsworth and Southey agreed in politics and in devotion to literature; but both were exceedingly reserved, and neither had enough humour to overcome the reserve; with each the envelope of self-contained domesticity had a shell-like hardness. Wordsworth cared passionately for none of his friends; and Southey was not a man for whom anybody could care passionately. Intellectually, Wordsworth regarded him with cold approbation; he approved this and that in his poems, but found them all wanting in the essentials. Still, the relations bore well the strain of time. Forty years the poets were neighbours; and "loving friends" they may without much straining of words be said to have been. "In every relation of life, and every point of view, Wordsworth is a truly exemplary and admirable man." So Southey wrote of him after twenty years' proximity. Sometimes they would exchange visits of a few days. Sometimes the Greta Hall and Rydal folks would have long summer outings together and picnic here and there. One great expedition signalized Waterloo year. A bonfire was to be lit on Skiddaw, and on

August 21, the Southeys, Wordsworths (the poet and his wife, Dorothy and the boy John), with other friends (among whom was a son of Johnson's Boswell), climbed the mountain to make the celebration. They set out about four in the afternoon; roasted beef and boiled plum-pudding on the summit; sang "God save the King" round flaming tar-barrels; fired cannon; and rolled blazing balls of tow and turpentine down the sides of the hill. Never, surely, was timeless Skiddaw disturbed by such a tumult of the children of time! The only mishap was of Wordsworth's making. When boiling-water was wanted for punch it was found that somebody "with a red cloak on" had overturned the kettle. The red cloak was brought home to Wordsworth; he had thrown one of Mrs. Southey's round his shoulders. "He thought to slink off undiscovered," wrote Southey; "but I punished him by singing a parody which they all joined in! 'Twas *you* that kicked the kettle down! 'twas you, Sir, you!'" The water-drinking poet had done more harm than he realized. Some of the party had to take their rum stronger than otherwise they would have done (how far we have travelled in less than a hundred years!); and the descent of Skiddaw was made towards midnight in a rather scandalous manner.

None of Wordsworth's contemporary critics was quite as deliberately and steadily admiring as Southey. The most solid and solemn expression of his judgment was given in 1829. It is important as containing the maximum of his dispraise. "A greater poet than Wordsworth there never has been, nor ever will be. I could point out some of his pieces which seem to me good for nothing, and not a few faulty passages, but I know of no poet in any language who has written so much that is good." In 1814 (the year when *The Excursion* appeared) he had written: "I speak not from the partiality of friendship, nor because we have been so absurdly held up as both writing upon one concerted system of poetry, but with the most deliberate exercise of impartial judgment whereof I am capable, when I declare my full conviction that posterity will rank him with Milton."

Southey's sun declined and set in a murky west. His first wife, the mother of his children, had to be taken from her home in 1834, and in 1837 she died without having recovered

her mental health. A week or two before the end Southey wrote: "The worst has long been past, and when our sharp grief is over, we shall be thankful for her deliverance from the body of this death."

To a man of sixty-four widowerhood may be an intolerable burden. Southey was to survive his wife not much more than five years, and they were not happy years. He went on with his work; he saw friends; he travelled; but it was evident that he was broken irrecoverably. It was no sign to the contrary that in this condition he suddenly married again. At Lymington in Hampshire there lived a minor poetess called Caroline Bowles, in whose works Southey had long taken an interest, and with whom he had often corresponded. She was twelve years his junior. On his way back from the Continent he visited her at Lymington, and in 1839 they were married. It was a pity; but there is no power to prevent such unseemly things. The marriage did not even arrest Southey's decline; the fire and strength had gone from his face; he was languid and torpid. Power of work, power of memory ebbed away. At last he could only look at his books with the old hunger, kiss them with the old passion.

Even in 1840, three years before his death, he did not at first recognize Wordsworth when he went once to see him. "Then his eyes flashed for a moment with their former brightness, but he sank into the state in which I had found him, patting with both hands his books affectionately like a child." Further and further into the shadow he passed; until, in March, 1843, what had long been oblivion deepened into death.

"All in the wild March morning," Wordsworth and Quillinan, his son-in-law, came to the funeral. The grave is conspicuous in Crosthwaite churchyard; and in the church there is a recumbent figure inscribed with Wordworth's lines. They are true to the man they commemorate.

> "Ye vales and hills, whose beauty hither drew
> The poet's steps, and fixed him here; on you
> His eyes have closed; and ye loved books, no more
> Shall Southey feed upon your precious lore,
> To works that ne'er shall forfeit their renown
> Adding immortal labours of his own,—
> Whether he traced historic truth with zeal
> For the state's guidance or the church's weal,

Or fancy disciplined by curious art
Informed his pen, or wisdom of the heart,
Or judgments sanctioned in the patriot's mind
By reverence for the rights of all mankind.
Wide were his aims, yet in no human breast
Could private feelings meet in holier rest.
His joys—his griefs—have vanished like a cloud
From Skiddaw's top ; but he to Heaven was vowed
Through a life long and pure, and steadfast faith
Calm'd in his soul the fear of change and death."

It was Wordsworth who remarked on the accurate self-portraiture of Southey's well-known lyric, written in 1818—

"My days among the Dead are past ;
Around me I behold,
Where'er these casual eyes are cast,
The mighty minds of old ;
My never-failing friends are they,
With whom I converse day by day.

"With them I take delight in weal
And seek relief in woe ;
And while I understand and feel
How much to them I owe,
My cheeks have often been bedew'd
With tears of thoughtful gratitude.

"My thoughts are with the Dead, with them
I live in long-past years,
Their virtues love, their faults condemn,
Partake their hopes and fears,
And from their lessons seek and find
Instruction with an humble mind.

'My hopes are with the Dead, anon
My place with them will be,
And I with them will travel on
Through all Futurity ;
Yet leaving here a name, I trust,
That will not perish in the dust."

CHAPTER VI

GRASMERE

WORDSWORTH'S winter in Germany in 1798–9 left no permanent mark on his life. Had Wordsworth been a rather different man, the result might have been very different. To a poet of his temperament and at his age, nothing more stimulating might have happened than a visit to the Germany of those days. For Wordsworth was an innovator, a literary reformer, a Romanticist; and the land in which he sojourned was in the blaze of its *Aufklärung*, in the stir of a Romantic movement more many-sided than that in Britain, and, in its results, perhaps, even more solidly constructive. When Wordsworth and his sister, with Coleridge, landed at Hamburg in September, 1798, German literature was ending its first modern half-century of genuine native vigour, and several imperishable monuments of its thought were already there, plain to see. Among them, Lessing the critic, and Klopstock and Wieland the poets, had broken the spell of French influence, and had claimed a large place in the world for the inborn Teutonic spirit; and, though the poets were to survive as little more than names, Lessing was to live as one of the greatest of modern critics. For more than thirty years *The Sorrows of Werther* and *Götz von Berlichingen*, pure types respectively of sentimental and picturesque Romanticism, had been before the world. They were the work of Goethe; and, by 1798, Goethe had done much of his greater work, beside which *Götz* and *Werther* have a merely curious and historic interest—work like the lyrics, the first part of *Faust*, and *Wilhelm Meister*—which far transcends any petty antithesis of "classical" and "romantic." And German philosophy was well in line with German literature. For in that same year, 1798, German thought had been powerfully

influenced for seventeen years by the mature philosophy of Immanuel Kant. In all respects the intellectual fascination of Germany was strong and might have been overpowering. There was, no doubt, another side to the picture. The want of political unity in Germany was reflected in German intellectual life ; as patriotism was local rather than national, much of literature was a thing of *coteries* and cliques, and its national import might easily miss being realized. Yet there was enough, both in prose and verse, one would have thought, to arrest a mind like Wordsworth's, and give it a powerful bent.

And was not Coleridge his companion, Coleridge the critic on a level with Lessing, Coleridge the close student of contemporary philosophy, who well knew Kant and his importance, and was to be identified more nearly than with anything else, with the triumphs and mysteries of German idealism? The companionship, we must notice, soon broke down. The poets parted at Hamburg, Coleridge going to Ratzeburg, from which he afterwards migrated to Göttingen ; and the Wordsworths taking up their quarters at Goslar, south of Brunswick, near the Harz mountains. Coleridge took his German visit seriously ; he worked hard at the language ; matriculated at the University of Göttingen, and collected materials for a life of Lessing. The Wordsworths' sojourn, on the other hand, was very nearly a failure. Goslar was as dull as ditchwater ; the climate was cold, and it was the hardest winter of the century ; the Wordsworths were not good at making friends ; Wordsworth detested tobacco ; from the social point of view in Germany, Dorothy was an encumbrance to her brother. They made small progress in Germany, and the months flowed on drearily. Before parting from Coleridge they met Klopstock's brother at Hamburg, and saw Klopstock himself, from whom they got a very garbled account of the state of German literature. Wieland was represented as more important than Goethe. Kant, Klopstock found "utterly incomprehensible" ; "Kant," Wordsworth represented him as saying, "had appeared ambitious to be the founder of a sect ; he had succeeded ; but the Germans were now coming to their senses again."

This kind of thing fitted in with Wordsworth's prejudices. He was intensely insular. He could feel the beating of the

universal heart, but not easily through books; it must communicate itself to him through the mountains and the groves, the changing clouds and frolicking lambs of his native land. Goethe was too non-moral to be even tolerable to him; he hated him to the end of his life. Wordsworth was a philosopher, indeed, and an idealist; but his philosophy was his own: he was no student, and would never have had patience or docility enough to enrich his thought with the systematic thought of the Germans, expressed in their difficult tongue.

And so, though he was by no means idle at Goslar, his energy was the energy of reminiscence. He neither studied Kant nor read Goethe; he was nearly frozen to death in his bedroom over an unceiled passage in a draper's house; he was not fortunately situated with respect to the attainment of his main object, a knowledge of the language. Nor was he well: he was weakly, and suffered from pain in the side. While he walked in the freezing days in the ghost-haunted imperial town, his spirit wandered still in lakeland or among the Alfoxden hollies, and the serene purpose of the lonely English poet lost no whit of its individuality. It may be too much to say, as Mr. Myers has said, that "the four months spent at Goslar were the very bloom of Wordsworth's poetic career;" but it is not too much to say that they were no interruption to that career, that, on the contrary, they forwarded it by a kind of force of antagonism. He composed his verses by Dorothy's side, or "with no companion but a kingfisher" glancing by him, as he walked in the public gardens. In his exile, he felt himself like a half-dead fly he saw crawling back to life in the warmth of the dreary un-English stove as he toiled over his German. He hated the look of the heraldic Brunswick horse on the stove.

> "A plague on your languages, German and Norse!
> Let me have the song of the kettle;
> And the tongs and the poker, instead of that horse,
> That gallops away with such fury and force
> On this dreary dull plate of black metal.
>
> "See that Fly,—a disconsolate creature!
> perhaps
> A child of the field or the grove;
> And, sorrow for him! the dull treacherous heat
> Has seduced the poor fool from his winter retreat,
> And he creeps to the edge of my stove."

Could but the fly be saved till the summer; could but the poet be restored to the places he loved!

"God is my witness, thou small helpless thing!
Thy life I would gladly sustain
Till summer come up from the south, and with crowds
Of thy brethren a march thou shouldst sound through the clouds,
And back to the forests again!"

But at least the poet could dream of home scenes and folk. It was at Goslar that he wrote *Nutting*, that record of spiritual progress at Hawkshead that we already know. Here, too, he recalled the deathbed of Taylor, the Hawkshead headmaster, in an "address" to the Hawkshead scholars.

"I kissed his cheek before he died;
And when his breath was fled,
I raised, while kneeling by his side,
His hand:—it dropped like lead.
Your hands, dear little ones, do all
That can be done, will never fall
Like his till they are dead."

It was at Goslar that he wrote *Lucy Gray* and *Ruth—Lucy Gray*, founded on an incident near Halifax, told him by Dorothy, an experiment in the Wordsworthian spiritualization of "things common"; *Ruth*, a ballad of

"An innocent life, yet far astray!"

which grew out of a west country story.

"That oaten pipe of hers is mute,
Or thrown away; but with a flute
Her loneliness she cheers;
This flute, made of a hemlock stalk,
At evening in his homeward walk
The Quantock woodman hears."

To Goslar, too, belong the *Lucy* poems, that strange little lovely group, which breathe a passion unfamiliar to Wordsworth, and about which he—so ready to talk about the genesis of his poems—has told us nothing. Was it pure idealization? Why not? Or was it idealization started by some fugitive fancy? Or was there something deeper at the base, unspoken and unspeakable? Does it matter? Let a poet keep some of his secrets: we need not grudge him the privacy when the poetry is as beautiful as this; when there is such celebration of girlhood, love, and death. Who does not know, who can too

often hear about, the girl whom Nature trained with her own hand? In the strange spaces of the Harz Forest, Wordsworth saw and described the training.

"Three years she grew in sun and shower,
Then Nature said, 'A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown;
This Child I to myself will take;
She shall be mine, and I will make
A Lady of my own.

"'Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse: and with me
The Girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.

"'She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs;
And hers shall be the breathing balm,
And hers the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

"'The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her; for her the willow bend;
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the Storm
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

"'The Stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

"'And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height
Her virgin bosom swell;
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
Here in the happy dell.'

"Thus Nature spake—The work was done—
How soon my Lucy's race was run!
She died, and left to me
This heath, this calm, and quiet scene;
The memory of what has been,
And never more will be."

The thought of Lucy added bitterness to the separation from England.

"I travelled among unknown men,
In lands beyond the sea;
Nor, England! did I know till then
What love I bore to thee."

He will not again go abroad, for—

"She I cherished turned her wheel
Beside an English fire."

Who and what was she?

"She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove;
A Maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love:

"A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!
—Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky."

She died—after Nature's blessed work was done, indeed; and before she had lost her girlhood.

"She is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!"

The poet's sense of loss is sublime in its utter simplicity. He finds harmony rather than harshness in the contrast between the illusion of love and the fact of death.

"A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears;
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

"No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rock, and stones, and trees."

At Goslar, Wordsworth wrote the spirited *apologia* for poetry called *A Poet's Epitaph*. But the energy of reminiscence and verse-making brought about greater results than any of these.

The idea which had haunted him at Alfoxden, the idea of a great poem on the relations of Man and Nature, haunted him still. This was to be his life-work, his epic, his product which

"posterity would not willingly let die." At Goslar, as we have seen, he meditated much on his Hawkshead schooldays; and more and more his subject presented itself to him in an autobiographical shape. No better introduction, he felt, could be found for a poem on Man and the World, than a poem on the growth of his own mind, a poetic record of the process by which he and Nature won each other—the "spousal verse" of that particular "consummation."

Accordingly, when the happy moment arrived of release from imperial, frosty, dreary Goslar, as he drove towards Göttingen and Coleridge, Wordsworth began *The Prelude*. He felt like a bird freed from a cage. "O there is blessing," he sang, as the horses' feet carried him along—

> "O there is blessing in this gentle breeze,
> A visitant that while it fans my cheek
> Doth seem half-conscious of the joy it brings."

To the breeze without, there was an answering stir of the poet's spirit; within as without, there was the sense of the break-up of a long frost. The poet was free once more; free to settle where he would, to do what he would. It was another crisis, like the crisis of the morning after the ball. And it was met in the same spirit.

> "To the open fields I told
> A prophecy: poetic numbers came
> Spontaneously to clothe in priestly robe
> A renovated spirit singled out,
> Such hope was mine, for holy services."

As one reads on in *The Prelude*, one passes without a break—so the poet idealized the facts—from the departure from Goslar to the settlement at Grasmere. And, indeed, even biography has little to say about the intervening months. After paying a good long visit to Coleridge at Göttingen, William and Dorothy returned to England in the spring of 1799. There was no possibility of going back to Alfoxden, and they at once made for the North, going to stay with the Hutchinsons at Sockburn-on-Tees, on the borders of Durham and Yorkshire. That was their headquarters through the summer and autumn. It was the North, the land of mountain and flood; but it was not the Lake Country. Hardly yet had Wordsworth, the

DOVE COTTAGE, TOWN END, GRASMERE

Cockermouth child, the Hawkshead schoolboy, familiar with Esthwaite and Windermere, penetrated into the central Paradise. He was to do so now ; he was to occupy it, to take possession of it, for ever.

In September, he walked over into Westmorland with his sailor brother John and Coleridge. They entered the Paradise from Ambleside. As we think of them let us join ourselves to their shades, and go with them, as they advance to this immortal conquest. Two of our companions, we know, are good company. What of John Wordsworth, the sailor? Alas! we shall hear much of him in the next chapter. Meanwhile, take a beautiful sentence about him, written by Coleridge to Dorothy. "Your brother John is one of you ; a man who hath solitary usings of his own intellect, deep in feeling, with a subtle tact, a swift instinct of truth and beauty."

The most natural road by which to leave Ambleside is that which follows at some distance the course of the Rothay. It is broad, level, and shady ; rich woods fringe the lower slopes of Loughrigg on the left ; sweet meadows lie along the stream ; the park-land of Rydal Hall, with noble trees and verdant meads, is on the right. But the magnet which draws the traveller is the mountain mass ahead of him, the fascination of the cloudy blue heights of Fairfield, which he sees, and the knowledge that greater Helvellyn rises beyond, out of sight. Bright streams, Scandale beck, Rydal beck, come down from the right to add their waters to the Rothay. Rydal Hall seems to dominate the valley, with Fairfield and his tributary, Nab Scar, towering just behind. What will the road do when it gets under the hills? Will it take Rydal Hall by storm and be carried over the mountains? The road, followed closely by our ghostly band, avoids Rydal and gently carries us to the left, till we find that we are in a valley running north-westward, with Nab Scar rising steeply on the right, gentler Loughrigg opposite, and the loveliest of lakes opening before us. It is Rydal lake, out of which the Rothay has come, and the road takes us for about a mile and a half along its whole length. At its further extremity we are confronted by a shoulder of hill which must be either surmounted or circumvented. The modern highroad circumvents it, rounding the lake, and keeping close to the Rothay, which is here, again, murmuring in a woody gorge. But for us ghosts of 1799

there is no such road : we climb straight forward, keeping to what was then the only coach-road, or we may, if we will, and if we know exactly what we are making for, keep to the right, following bridle-paths over the moss and the rocks. In the thirties, Dr. Arnold of Rugby christened the three ways from Rydal to Grasmere—beginning with the rough path furthest to the right—*Old Corruption*, *Bit-by-bit Reform*, and *Radical Reform*. To-day let us keep to the Bit-by-bit Reform road : it is wild enough for anybody ; the heather is still aglow ; the bright moss is wet with trickling streamlets ; there is scarlet lichen on the rocks ; though only the creamy, starfish-like rosettes of the butterwort leaves are to be seen, and there is no chance now of finding even a late specimen of the pink "mealy" primrose, there is plenty of the beautiful grass of Parnassus in the boggy places. We have not gone far before we realize that the road is bearing us to the right, and then, suddenly, we look down on a new lake, and we are in Grasmere Vale.

Grasmere Vale, with its long oval lake, and the scattered hamlet with the simple church at its further or north-western end, was to be Wordsworth's home for thirteen years. It is more truly and vitally, biographically and spiritually as well as scenically and physically, the centre of the Lake District than even Ambleside, from above which we first took stock of the neighbourhood. Endowed with the utmost beauty granted to the region, as beautiful, essentially, as Ullswater or Derwentwater, it has a repose, an inwardness, a perfect tranquillity, which are all its own. And these things it had even more completely when Wordsworth dwelt within it. For now, though no railway-sounds insult it, the coach-road from Ambleside to Keswick follows closely its north-eastern shore, and carries a constant stream of pleasure-seeking traffic through its very heart. Wordsworth lived to see the construction of that road, and to lament it with the indulged querulousness of a spoilt poet. But, when he was most identified with the vale, the road ran high above the lake and at some distance back from it, and only a rough path, fit for poets, anglers, or lovers, lay between the broad expanse and its girdling mountains.

> "A narrow girdle of rough stones and crags,
> A rude and natural causeway, interposed

Between the water and a winding slope
Of copse and thicket, leaves the eastern shore
Of Grasmere safe in its own privacy."

The character of shy inwardness is given to Grasmere by the fact that it lies almost at right angles to Rydal and not in line with it, so that the traveller has, as it were, to seek for it ere he finds it. And when he does find it, and his eye rests on its quiet church-tower, and on the mountains that rise behind the church and the village, he feels that no more central citadel is to be won.

As a schoolboy, Wordsworth had looked into this sweet and holy place on a summer's day, and had hoped it might be his lot to live and die there. The centre of his Lakeland, it became the centre of his own affections and genius. He thought of it often; and the place became—

"As beautiful to thought, as it had been
When present, to the bodily sense; a haunt
Of pure affections, shedding upon joy
A brighter joy; and through such damp and gloom
Of the gay mind as ofttimes splenetic youth
Mistakes for sorrow, darting beams of light
That no self-cherished sadness could withstand."

And now, in September, 1799, the poet, in his thirtieth year, is looking down on the lake again. With his companions, he had climbed from Rydal, like Benjamin the Waggoner whom he was to celebrate—

"Now he leaves the lower ground,
And up the craggy hill ascending
Many a stop and stay he makes,
Many a breathing-fit he takes;—
Steep the way and wearisome"

—at all events for a waggon-team and a thirsty driver! After the "wishing-gate" is passed, the road descends upon the lake level, which it reaches close to the head of the lake, and a short half-mile from the church. Just above the level, on the right-hand side of the road, there stood, in Wordsworth's childhood, a whitewashed public-house, the "Dove and Olive Bough," which—

"Offered a greeting of good ale
To all who entered Grasmere Vale;"

but now, when he descends the hill with Coleridge and brother John, the sign is gone and the house is empty.

The travellers stayed some days at Grasmere, and John left his brother and Coleridge there. Both were delighted with the place in spite of bad weather; and Wordsworth had what he was afraid Dorothy would consider a "mad" idea of building a house by the lake. If that was a mad idea, what about the old "Dove and Olive Bough," the empty cottage at "Town End," by the side of the Ambleside road? Might that not do for a home? On his return to Sockburn Wordsworth talked over the matter with Dorothy, and the end of it was that the empty cottage at Town End was taken, to be the home first of the brother and sister and then of the brother's wife as well, for nine years, and to be famous as "Dove Cottage" for evermore.

It was on one of the last days of the year, St. Thomas' Day, 1799, that the "flitting" from Yorkshire was made. The two companions did it on foot, coming by Askrigg, and through Wensleydale (where they heard the story of "Hart Leap Well") to Kendal, and so on into the vale. "On Nature's invitation" he sang afterwards:—

> "On Nature's invitation do I come,
> By Reason sanctioned."

"Bleak was it," he went on:—

> "Bleak season was it, turbulent and bleak,
> When hitherward we journeyed side by side
> Through burst of sunshine and through flying showers;
> . . . . . .
> Stern was the face of Nature; we rejoiced
> In that stern countenance, for our souls thence drew
> A feeling of their strength. The naked trees,
> The icy brooks, as on we passed, appeared
> To question us. 'Whence come ye, to what end?'
> They seemed to say, 'What would ye?'
> Said the shower,
> 'Wild Wanderers, whither through my dark domain?'
> The sunbeam said, 'Be happy.' When this vale
> We entered, bright and solemn was the sky
> That faced us with a passionate welcoming,
> And led us to our threshold."

The Grasmere years, thus entered upon, are, beyond question, the central period of Wordsworth's poetic life. That life beats

at its strongest under the humble roof of Dove Cottage, and is fed to its richest results, by the scenes and the folk, the hills and the wild vales of that narrow place. For one thing—perhaps for chief thing—the blessing of Windybrow, Racedown, Alfoxden, and Goslar was continued to the poet: he there had the companionship of Dorothy, and he had it for a year or two without the distraction of new family love. As his sister had been to him on the banks of Wye, so she was on the shores of Grasmere. As he thinks of her, he asks his very heart to pause on the thought.

"Pause upon that and let the breathing frame
No longer breathe, but all be satisfied.
. . . . . .
. . . Mine eyes did ne'er
Fix on a lovely object, nor my mind
Take pleasure in the midst of happy thoughts,
But either she whom now I have, who now
Divides with me this loved abode, was there
Or not far off. Where'er my footsteps turned
Her voice was like a hidden Bird that sang,
The thought of her was like a flash of light
Or an unseen companionship, a breath
Of fragrance independent of the Wind."

In the fragment of *The Recluse* from which these lines are taken, Wordsworth gives his version of the setting of his new home.

"Embrace me, then, ye Hills, and close me in;
Now in the clear and open day I feel
Your guardianship; I take it to my heart;
'Tis like the solemn shelter of the night.
But I would call thee beautiful, for mild,
And soft, and gay, and beautiful thou art,
Dear Valley, having in thy face a smile
Though peaceful, full of gladness. Thou art pleased,
Pleased with thy crags and woody steeps, thy Lake,
Its one green island and its winding shores;
The multitude of little rocky hills,
Thy Church and cottages of mountain stone
Clustered like stars some few, but single most,
And lurking dimly in their shy retreats,
Or glancing at each other cheerful looks
Like separated stars with clouds between."

All the sights and sounds of beautiful country are here, but at Grasmere there is something beyond these.

> "These have we, and a thousand nooks of earth
> Have also these, but nowhere else is found
> The one sensation that is here ; 'tis here,
> Here as it found its way into my heart
> In childhood, here as it abides by day,
> By night, here only ; or in chosen minds
> That take it with them hence, where'er they go.
> —'Tis, but I cannot name it, 'tis the sense
> Of majesty, and beauty, and repose,
> A blended holiness of earth and sky,
> Something that makes this individual spot,
> This small abiding-place of many men,
> A termination, and a last retreat,
> A centre, come from wheresoe'er you will.
> A whole without dependence or defect,
> Made for itself, and happy in itself,
> Perfect contentment, Unity entire."

Thanks to the poetry and patriotism of an eminent Englishman, himself a poet and a richly endowed critic, Dove Cottage is now national property, kept as Wordsworth made it, and accessible to every reverent foot and eye. Let us enter, then, and look round.

Behind the cottage the hill rises steeply, so steeply and so immediately that the garden and orchard with which Wordsworth's verse has made us so familiar must be a veritable hanging garden. For between the house and the road there is no room for pleasure ground of any kind ; you could drop a stone sheer from the latticed windows on the road below. The pretty diamond panes give charm to the plain white front of the house, up which creepers climb. When De Quincey first saw it two yew trees broke the "glare" of the white walls. There is a little gate in the rough stone wall, and the door opens at the end and not in the front of the house. What De Quincey calls "a little semi-vestibule" brings you to the principal ground-floor room (the only room on the ground floor, in fact, except Dorothy's bedroom and the kitchen). It is a quaint little living-room, with a most serviceable and kitchen-like fireplace, and De Quincey, who knew it so well, shall describe it. "An oblong square not above eight and a half feet high, sixteen feet

long, and twelve broad; very prettily wainscoted from the floor to the ceiling with dark polished oak, slightly embellished with carving. One window there was—a perfect and unpretending cottage window, with little diamond panes embowered at every season of the year with roses; and, in the summer and autumn, with a profusion of jasmine and other fragrant shrubs. From the exuberant luxuriance of the vegetation around it, and from the dark hue of the wainscoting, this window, though tolerably large, did not furnish a very powerful light." This was the essential family-room, the dining-room of the Wordsworths. A modest staircase of fourteen steps (so De Quincey had counted) brings one to the corresponding two rooms above, a little drawing-room over the dining-room, and Wordsworth's bedroom over Dorothy's. In the drawing-room, too, the fireplace is kitchen-like; the room has old-fashioned high-backed chairs with Dorothy's work on the seats; and it was Wordsworth's study, "for in a small recess" there are bookshelves, and in those bookshelves reposed the library of the most unbookish of poets, a collection of "perhaps three hundred volumes." There are two other small rooms upstairs: one specially tiny one without a fireplace the Wordsworths built, and Dorothy papered it, and the tiny passage leading to it, with newspapers.

De Quincey did not see Dove Cottage until 1807. When the Wordsworths took it there were no creepers on the walls, but the new tenants at once set about planting roses and honeysuckle, and in their first year had a bright show of scarlet runner against the whitewash. Come out now through a back-door into the steep garden and orchard behind; for here probably more Wordsworthianism came to the birth than within any of the walls. The rough stone steps leading up the incline are there as Wordsworth laid them; there are such flowers as he planted, and the well he made; there are the apple-trees which justify the word "orchard"; there, at the top of the steep little enclosure, is the view-point, and there *was* the moss-hut in the old days. There were then no stifling houses, no prosaic chimney-tops between the cottage and the lake; there was no big modern hotel; there were no crowds of pleasure-seekers. Nothing disturbed the feeling of "termination" and of "last retreat." In his delightful pamphlet about Dove Cottage, Mr. Stopford Brooke has said all that needs to be

said or can be said about the garden and orchard in their vital relation to Wordsworth's poetry. But indeed we need not go beyond the limits of that poetry, supplemented by Dorothy's prose, to be able to feel our way about the little enclosure as well as out beyond it. Here was the hedge-sparrow's nest with the "bright blue eggs" which recalled a similar one in the Cockermouth garden.

> "On me the chance-discovered sight
> Gleamed like a vision of delight.
> I started—seeming to espy
> The home and sheltered bed,
> The sparrow's dwelling, which, hard by
> My Father's house, in wet or dry
> My sister Emmeline and I
> Together visited."

["Emmeline" is, of course, conventional-poetical for Dorothy]—

> "She looked at it and seemed to fear it;
> Dreading, tho' wishing, to be near it;
> Such heart was in her, being then
> A little Prattler among men.
> The Blessing of my later years
> Was with me when a boy:
> She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;
> A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;
> And love, and thought, and joy."

It was from the orchard that the cuckoo was heard—

> "While I am lying on the grass
> Thy twofold shout I hear.
> . . . . .
> And I can listen to thee yet;
> Can lie upon the plain.
> And listen, till I do beget
> That golden time again."

Here, in and out of this apple or pear tree, flashed the green linnet, the "Brother of the dancing leaves," whose song, "poured forth in gushes," is so unrealistically described. Here on the turf shone the celandine and the daisy, to the former of which Wordsworth sang two songs, and to the latter three. Here the robin was scolded for chasing a butterfly—

"Would'st thou be happy in thy nest,
O pious Bird, whom man loves best,
Love him, or leave him alone!"

Here the butterfly itself was apostrophized—

"I've watched you now a full half-hour,
Self-poised upon that yellow flower;
And, little Butterfly! indeed
I know not if you sleep or feed.
How motionless!—not frozen seas
More motionless! and then
What joy awaits you, when the breeze
Hath found you out among the trees,
And calls you forth again!

"This plot of orchard-ground is ours;
My trees they are, my Sister's flowers;
Here rest your wings when they are weary;
Here lodge as in a sanctuary!
Come often to us, fear no wrong;
Sit near us on the bough!
We'll talk of sunshine and of song,
And summer days, when we were young;
Sweet childish days, that were as long
As twenty days are now."

Here is the "rocky Well" beside which were planted the globe-flowers and marsh-marigolds from the lake-side. Here on the grass lay Coleridge in the early Grasmere days, and here Wordsworth looked at him and sang of him that mysterious song so hard to interpret—the *Stanzas written in my Pocket-Copy of Thomson's Castle of Indolence.* Who is who in that poem?* This, anyhow, must be Coleridge—

"Ah! piteous sight it was to see this Man
When he came back to us, a withered flower,—
Or, like a sinful creature, pale and wan.
Down would he sit; and without strength or power
Look at the common grass from hour to hour:
And oftentimes, how long I fear to say,
Where apple-trees in blossom made a bower,
Retired in that sunshiny shade he lay;
And, like a naked Indian, slept himself away."

* I myself incline to the belief that the second character—the "noticeable Man with large grey eyes"—is neither Coleridge nor Wordsworth but some one else, very likely, as has been conjectured, William Calvert, Raisley Calvert's brother. But no theory removes all the difficulties. See Mr. Knight's notes on the poem, "Knight's Wordsworth," II. 307-9, and Appendix.

Beyond the limits of the garden and the orchard, up on the heights above the old Ambleside road, and round the crescent at the head of the lake—Easedale opening on the other side, and Dunmail Raise rising up behind—how full was the tide of poetry between 1800 and 1808! Hammer Scar and the Helm and Silver How, there they all are; down Easedale yonder, runs the rivulet by which the poet roamed "in the confusion of his heart" one April morning; the rivulet which—

> "Sent forth such sallies of glad sound, that all
> Which I till then had heard, appeared the voice
> Of common pleasure: beast and bird, the lamb,
> The shepherd's dog, the linnet and the thrush
> Vied with this waterfall, and made a song,
> Which, while I listened, seemed like the wild growth
> Or like some natural produce of the air,
> That could not cease to be."

Very different associations cling to "the boisterous brook of Greenhead Ghyll" which tumbles down through a wild chink in the hills that rise on the right about half a mile out of Grasmere as you mount the Raise northwards; for there is the "unfinished sheepfold," and there (as Wordsworth arranged certain facts) the tragedy of *Michael* was accomplished. Up the Raise road to Wythburn and Thirlmere, toiled the Waggoner's horses. Stone-Arthur is on the right, the "Eminence of these our hills"—which can *not* be seen from the Dove Cottage orchard, though it suited the poet to say that it could—the hill which, as William and Dorothy walked on the road, seemed to restore their hearts with its "deep quiet"; in truth—

> "The loneliest place we have among the clouds."

Dorothy named it after her brother—

> "She who dwells with me, whom I have loved
> With such communion that no place on earth
> Can ever be a solitude to me,
> Hath to this lonely summit given my Name."

Was that the mountain-top upon which the star listened to the voices of earth on that September evening in 1806, when the poet had "just read in a newspaper that the dissolution of Mr. Fox was hourly expected"? What an evening for such a

poet to realize that such a man was passing "to breathless Nature's dark abyss!" Wordsworth had loved Fox because he loved French liberty; for him he was both good and great.

"Loud is the Vale! the Voice is up
With which she speaks when storms are gone,
A mighty unison of streams!
Of all her Voices, One!

"Loud is the Vale;—this inland Depth
In peace is roaring like the Sea;
Yon star upon the mountain-top
Is listening quietly.

. . . . . .

When the great and good depart
What is it more than this—

"That Man, who is from God sent forth,
Doth yet again to God return?"

Up towards the wild White-moss, across which comes the highest route from Rydal, and quite near the Town End Cottage, there are at least two spots sacred to genius. There is the "stately Fir grove," which was "a favourite haunt with us all," and which offered a grateful shelter in the snowy days of the first winter at Grasmere. It was—

"A cloistral place
Of refuge, with an unencumbered floor.
Here, in soft covert, on the shallow snow,
And sometimes, on a speck of visible earth,
The redbreast near me hopped."

Here would come stray sheep, "stragglers from some mountain-flock," surveying the pacing poet "with suspicious stare"—

"Huddling together from two fears—the fear
Of me and of the storm."

And, as we shall find in the next chapter, the place had deeper and dearer associations. In that direction, too, a few hundred yards from the cottage, one autumn day in 1800, Wordsworth met the hero of *Resolution and Independence*, an old leech-gatherer bent double, with an apron and a night-cap, who was on his way to Carlisle to try to make a living by selling "godly books." He told him his story, and the poet afterwards placed him in a different setting of scenery. It

was not at Grasmere but on Barton Fell, near the north-eastern end of Ullswater, that Wordsworth walked one morning after a night of wind and rain—

> "There was a roaring in the wind all night;
> The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
> But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
> The birds are singing in the distant woods;
> Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
> The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;
> And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters.
>
> "All things that love the sun are out of doors;
> The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;
> The grass is bright with rain-drops;—on the moors
> The hare is running races in her mirth;
> And with her feet she from the plashy earth
> Raises a mist, that, glittering in the sun,
> Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run."

It was there and then that the poet fell into despondency; that—

> "Fears and fancies thick upon me came;
> Dim sadness—and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name."

He felt himself little better than an idler: he thought of Chatterton, of Burns; he was in Burns's mood when he sang—

> "All in this mottie, misty clime,
> I backward mus'd on wasted time,
> How I had spent my youthfu' prime,
> And done nae-thing,
> But stringin' blethers up in rhyme,
> For fools to sing."

Recollecting the emotion in tranquillity, he associated with his walk on Barton Fell, the leech-gatherer he met near Dove Cottage; he placed him at his trade by a lonely pool; the old man stood out before his memory, before his imagination, a completely idealized figure, "not all alive, nor dead," revealing himself in simile after simile—

> "As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
> Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
> Wonder to all who do the same espy,
> By what means it could thither come, and whence;
> So that it seems a thing endued with sense:

Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself.
. . . . . .
Upon the margin of that moorish flood
Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,
That heareth not the loud winds when they call
And moveth all together, if it move at all."

As he stirred the pool in an almost hopeless task, and for a pittance which it were mockery to call a livelihood, and yet kept his cheerfulness and dignity, his "rights of a man," he became for the poet the permanent symbol of resolution and independence; so that he—

"Could have laughed himself to scorn to find
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind."

By the side of the middle road, and overlooking the lake, stands the "Wishing-Gate," near which Wordsworth met "The Sailor's Mother." Further on, on the Rydal side of the hill, where the three roads into Grasmere diverge, were The Beggars about whom Dorothy told her brother.

In 1802, not much more than two years after the brother and sister came to Grasmere, they went across the mountains into Yorkshire to fetch William's bride, Mary Hutchinson. Before starting, William wrote *A Farewell* to his home, of which the whole may well be quoted, not only for its beauty, but because of its clear showing of their life in the place—

"Farewell, thou little Nook of mountain ground,
Thou rocky corner in the lowest stair
Of that magnificent temple which doth bound
One side of one whole vale with grandeur rare;
Sweet garden-orchard, eminently fair,
The loveliest spot that man hath ever found,
Farewell!—we leave thee to Heaven's peaceful care,
Thee, and the Cottage which thou dost surround.

"Our boat is safely anchored by the shore,
And there will safely ride when we are gone;
The flowering shrubs that deck our humble door
Will prosper, though untended and alone:
Fields, goods, and far-off chattels we have none:
These narrow bounds contain our private store
Of things earth makes, and sun doth shine upon;
Here are they in our sight—we have no more.

" Sunshine and shower be with you, bud and bell!
For two months now in vain we shall be sought;
We leave you here in solitude to dwell
With these our latest gifts of tender thought;
Thou, like the morning, in thy saffron coat,
Bright gowan, and marsh-marigold, farewell!
Whom from the borders of the Lake we brought,
And placed together near our rocky Well.

" We go for One to whom ye will be dear;
And she will prize this Bower, this Indian shed,
Our own contrivance, Building without peer!
—A gentle Maid, whose heart is lowly bred,
Whose pleasures are in wild fields gatherèd,
With joyousness, and with a thoughtful cheer,
Will come to you; to you herself will wed;
And love the blessed life that we lead here.

" Dear spot! which we have watched with tender heed,
Bringing thee chosen plants and blossoms blown
Among the distant mountains, flower and weed,
Which thou hast taken to thee as thy own,
Making all kindness registered and known;
Thou for our sakes, though Nature's child indeed,
Fair in thyself and beautiful alone,
Hast taken gifts which thou dost little need.

" And O most constant, yet most fickle Place,
That hast thy wayward moods, as thou dost show
To them who look not daily on thy face;
Who, being loved, in love no bounds dost know,
And say'st, when we forsake thee, 'Let them go!'
Thou easy-hearted Thing, with Thy wild race
Of weeds and flowers, till we return be slow,
And travel with the year at a soft pace.

" Help us to tell Her tales of years gone by,
And this sweet spring, the best beloved and best;
Joy will be flown in its mortality;
Something must stay to tell us of the rest.
Here, thronged with primroses, the steep rock's breast
Glittered at evening like a starry sky;
And in this bush our Sparrow built her nest,
Of which I sang one song that will not die.

" O happy Garden! whose seclusion deep
Hath been so friendly to industrious hours;
And to soft slumbers, that did gently steep
Our spirits, carrying with them dreams of flowers,

And wild notes warbled among leafy bowers ;
Two burning months let summer overleap,
And, coming back with Her who will be ours,
Into thy bosom we again shall creep."

After Wordsworth's descriptive and allusive Grasmere poetry, the next best original authorities for the Grasmere life are Dorothy's Journals, and Wordsworth's central poetry, which was, in its fulness, planned and carried out there, at Dove Cottage up to 1808 ; then, from 1808 to 1811, at Allan Bank, round the head of the lake ; and at Grasmere Parsonage, from 1811 to 1813.

One side of the life, its daily character, its occupations, joys, and trials, is faithfully mirrored in Dorothy's Journals. If by a poetic life is meant a life of "plain living and high thinking," of simplicity and communion with Nature, surely no life more poetic than this one was ever lived. And, as in the west country, so now here among the Lakes, the part played by Dorothy was as important, as significant, as the part played by William—

"She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears,
And love and thought and joy."

If that was true in the garden of childhood by the Derwent, if it was true among the coombs of Quantock and in the groves of Alfoxden, it was equally true in the holy place of Grasmere. If William was the interpreter of Nature, Dorothy was its registrar. And, as at Alfoxden her observation and registration were those of a poet and not of a naturalist, so was it at Grasmere. "More than half a poet" she records that she felt in one moment of special rapture ; but indeed she was wholly, if but potentially, a poet at all times. There is, in the later as in the earlier Journals, in the utterance of maturest womanhood as in the effervescence of a girl's enthusiasm, the same devotion to the beautiful ; the same spontaneity and orginality of expression ; the same charm of phrase ; the same startling vigour, at once realistic and imaginative, of epithet and simile. Her observation has an artist's minuteness ; it gives material for a thousand pictures. The commonest things are seen afresh, and invested with undying interest. Is it the old moon in the new moon's arms ? "On Friday evening the moon hung

over the northern side of the highest point of Silver How, like a gold ring snapped in two, and shaven off at the ends. Within this ring lay the circle of the round moon, as distinctly to be seen as ever the enlightened moon is. William had observed the same appearance at Keswick." Is it a birch tree in a strong October wind? "It was yielding to the gusty wind with all its tender twigs. The sun shone upon it, and it glanced in the wind like a flying sunshiny shower. It was a tree in shape, with stem and branches, but it was like a spirit of water. . . . The other birch trees that were near it looked bright and cheerful, but it was a creature by its own self among them." What effects on the water she saw; what *minutiæ* and mysteries of colour! "Rydal was very beautiful, with spear-shaped streaks of polished steel." "The moon shone like herrings in the water." "We walked round Rydal lake, rich, calm, streaked, very beautiful." "We amused ourselves for a long time in watching the breezes, some as if they came from the bottom of the lake, spread in a circle, brushing along the surface of the water, and growing more delicate [and] as it were thinner, and of a *paler* colour till they died away." "We walked before tea by Bainriggs to observe the many-coloured foliage. The oaks dark green with yellow leaves, the birches generally still green, some near the water yellowish, the sycamore crimson and crimson-tufted, the mountain ash a deep orange, the common ash lemon-colour, but many ashes still fresh in their peculiar green, those that were discoloured near the water." What intimacy with moon and stars! "The moon shone upon the waters below Silver How, and above it hung (combining with Silver How on one side) a bowl-shaped moon, the curve downwards; the white fields; glittering roof of Thomas Ashburner's house; the dark yew tree; the white fields, gay and beautiful. William lay with his curtains open that he might see it." "O, the unutterable darkness of the sky, and the earth below the moon, and the glorious brightness of the moon itself! There was a vivid sparkling streak of light at this end of Rydal Water, but the rest was very dark, and Loughrigg Fell and Silver How were white and bright, as if they were covered with hoar frost. The moon retired again, and appeared and disappeared several times before I reached home." "A sober starlight evening. The stars not shining as it were with all their brightness when they were visible, and

sometimes hiding themselves behind small greying clouds, that passed soberly along." "Jupiter was very glorious above the Ambleside hills, and one large star hung over the corner of the hills on the opposite side of Rydal Water." "When we returned many stars were out, the clouds were moveless. . . . Jupiter behind. Jupiter at least *we* call him, but William says we always call the largest star Jupiter."

As at Alfoxden, so here, Dorothy entered deeply into her brother's work. Yet the Journals do not show that she gave him much direct help except that of an *amanuensis*—which, indeed, in the case of one so marvellously averse from writing as Wordsworth, was no small benefit. She was aware of each piece of his work, and intensely, lovingly, sympathetic with him in it all. Sometimes one feels as if the sympathy were too feminine and sentimental to be invigorating. After the manner of poets, Wordsworth was fastidious, neurotic, and moody in his work ; and one feels, at times, that it would have been good if his sister had scolded or laughed at him. "We sat by the fire, and did not walk, but read *The Pedlar*, thinking it done ; but W. could find fault with one part of it. It was uninteresting, and must be altered. Poor William!" "We read the first part and were delighted with it, but William afterwards got to some ugly place, and went to bed tired out." Writing *The Leech Gatherer* "tired" him "to death." "William worked at *The Leech Gatherer* almost incessantly from morning till tea-time. . . . I was oppressed and sick at heart, for he wearied himself to death. After tea he wrote two stanzas in the manner of Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, and was tired out." "William did not sleep till three o'clock." "William very nervous. After he was in bed, haunted with altering *The Rainbow*." There is a frequent recurrence of this kind of thing. We feel that it tends to discredit the plain living and high thinking at Dove Cottage, and that Dorothy took it too seriously.

If William's moods and difficulties were a trouble, and sometimes an unreasonable trouble, to Dorothy's peace, a deeper and more real trouble came to her sensitive emotional nature through Coleridge. Ever since the fateful moment in 1796 when she had seen him leap the fence at Racedown, and had wondered at his talk and eyes, Coleridge had furnished its most powerful human element to Dorothy's life and her brother's.

It was Coleridge, we remember, Coleridge at Nether Stowey, that drew the Wordsworths into Somerset; and who could forget the trinity that they made there; the haunted stretch of road between Nether Stowey and Alfoxden; the mysterious intellectual commerce between Coleridge and Dorothy, investing some of the choicest phraseology of *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* with a doubtful parentage; who could forget the November walk to Lynton, and what came of it? Coleridge seemed to have gained no moral strength from his sojourn in Germany. He was now nearing thirty, but he was not improving in character. Impecuniousness, irresolution, desultoriness, and vagrancy, concerted demons of one injurious brood, had possession of him and would not let go; and his wonderful genius only quickened their baleful activity. When the Wordsworths settled at Grasmere, Coleridge had been five years a married man, and the second of his two sons, Derwent was born during their first summer at Dove Cottage. Yet the marriage, for some reason, was a failure; it seemed to share the blight which had fallen on the Pantisocracy scheme of which it had originally formed part. Mrs. Coleridge was the mother of Coleridge's children; but she was little besides to him. The dangerous habit of finding his pleasures and companionships elsewhere than at home he had indulged from the beginning, and it grew upon him. We remember how, like a hungry-hearted lover, he wrote to Thomas Poole about his coming to Stowey. Two anchors, indeed, and two anchors only held the poor drifting creature: his feeling for Poole, and his feeling for the Wordsworths. By the Wordsworths he was held the more firmly; and in the summer of 1800 he settled (if any alighting of his could be called settling) at Greta Hall. Thereafter for many years, though with intervals of varying length, he was constantly with the Wordsworths, delighting them, grieving them, enriching them, preying on them. He might turn up any stormy night, wet with the driving rain on the Raise or on a shoulder of Helvellyn, and when would he go away again? The dutiful Wordsworth loved him and lamented over him—

> "Never sun on living creature shone
> Who more devout enjoyment with us took:
> Here on his hours he hung as on a book,

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE
BY WASHINGTON ALLSTON IN 1814

On his own time here would he float away,
As doth a fly upon a summer brook;
But go to-morrow, or belike to-day,
Seek for him,—he is fled; and whither none can say."

"Thus often would he leave our pleasant home,

[and why not, pray? Had he not a home of his own, a wife and three children, and quite a "position," all the neighbours having paid their respects at Greta Hall?]

And find elsewhere his business or delight;
Out of our Valley's limits did he roam;
Full many a time, upon a stormy night,
His voice came to us from the neighbouring height:
Oft could we see him driving full in view
At mid-day when the sun was shining bright;
What ill was on him, what he had to do,
A mighty wonder bred among our quiet crew."

Dorothy's Journal is full of Coleridge, full of the old affectionate appreciation, full also of a keener pain. If Coleridge was not at Dove Cottage, or the Wordsworths were not at Greta Hall, there were long letters—letters which gave trouble and sometimes took away sleep. "At eleven o'clock Coleridge came" [this was August 29, 1800], "when I was walking in the still clear moonshine in the garden. He came over Helvellyn. William was gone to bed, and John also, worn out with his ride round Coniston. We sate and chatted till half-past three . . . Coleridge reading a part of *Christabel*. Talked much about the mountains, etc., etc." A few days later on the night of Grasmere Fair: "It was a lovely moonlight night. The moonlight shone only upon the village. It did not eclipse the village lights, and the sound of dancing and merriment came along the still air. I walked with Coleridge and William up the lane, and by the church, and there lingered with Coleridge in the garden. John and William were both gone to bed and all the lights out." Saturday, October, 4: "Coleridge came in while we were at dinner, very wet. We talked till twelve o'clock." Next morning: "Coleridge read *Christabel* a second time; we had increasing pleasure. A delicious morning. . . . Coleridge and I walked to Ambleside after dark." On some of these occasions "Sara" [Mrs. Coleridge] formed one of the happy group, and there

seemed no separate feeling. But it was far from being all happiness. Once, after a little visit to Keswick, Dorothy wrote: "Every sight and every sound reminded me of Coleridge—dear, dear fellow, of his many talks to us, by day and by night, of all dear things. I was melancholy, and could not talk, but at last I cured my heart by weeping. . . . O! how many, many reasons have I to be anxious for him." What were they, and why was Dorothy so distressed? Surely we know enough of Coleridge to know what they were. Were not all the problems about him summed up in the question which, according to Wordsworth, was constantly put by the "quiet crew" at Dove Cottage—

"What ill was on him, what he had to do"?

What ill was on him? For one thing, he had bad health; he was rheumatic and neuralgic; he sometimes had inflammation of the eyes. His irregular ways, his long walks in wind and rain, were not the best regimen for such a case. Did Dorothy and her brother know that he often fought pain and discomfort with doses of opium? Probably they either knew or suspected. Anyhow, they knew that Sara was little, and increasingly little, to Coleridge, and that Greta Hall was no home. That was bad enough. Then what Coleridge "had to do"; that was another tormenting problem. The second part of *Christabel* was all very well; it was nearly as beautiful, if not so magical, so entrancing, as the first part; but it left the poem a tantalizing fragment, and what next? Nay, even *Christabel* brought in nothing; it was not published until 1816, when Lord Byron's insight and kindness drew it from its obscurity. Desultoriness, irresolution, vagrancy, reinforced more and more by weak health, opium, and unhappiness, or something very near it, in married life—they were ruining Coleridge, and his genius could do hardly anything to stop them. At thirty what Carlyle said of him at nearly sixty was already painfully true: "To the man himself Nature had given, in high measure, the seeds of a noble endowment; and to unfold it had been forbidden him. A subtle lynx-eyed intellect, tremulous pious sensibility to all good and all beautiful; truly a ray of empyrean light;—but imbedded in such weak laxity of character, in such indolences and esuriences as had made strange work with it. Once more, the tragic story of a high endowment with an insufficient will."

How could such a spectacle, going on under their eyes, fail to grieve the Wordsworths? How, especially, could it fail to harrow Dorothy's sensitive soul? It is impossible to read the Grasmere Journals without realizing how vital was the companionship between Dorothy Wordsworth and Coleridge, and how mutual was their sympathy. It was the most natural thing in the world, and, of course, the most irreproachable thing in the world. Yet it was dangerous, perhaps; dangerous to Dorothy's peace and to Coleridge's; and if gossip said that Mrs. Coleridge was jealous, can we wonder?

In April, 1802, Coleridge, looking from Greta Hall at the spring sunset, and the new moon in a yellow-green west across Derwentwater, groaned out his heart-sickness in his famous *Dejection* ode. Never did the devil of despondency speak in more unmistakable tones; yet how through a poet's lips the accents come! Here is still the incommunicable magic of the *Ancient Mariner* and of *Christabel*. He sees the dim circle within the curve of the crescent moon, and he is haunted by a wild and ominous stanza from *Sir Patrick Spens*—

> "Well! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made
> The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
> This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
> Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade
> Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,
> Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes
> Upon the strings of this Æolian lute
> Which better far were mute.
> For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!
> And overspread with phantom light,
> (With swimming phantom-light o'erspread
> But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
> I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling
> The coming-on of rain and squally blast."

O that the omen might be fulfilled, that the tempest would burst: perhaps it might stir his stagnant gloom! When was such gloom more sternly portrayed?—

> "A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
> A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
> Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
> In word, or sigh, or tear."

Tranquil Nature, the aspect of Nature of which he had

sung in his *Nightingale* poem, can do nothing for him. It is of Wordsworth that he thinks as he looks at the beauty of this western sky, and it is to Wordsworth (literary fictions notwithstanding) that he makes his sad complaint :—

"In wan and heartless mood
. . . . . .
Have I been gazing on the western sky
. . . . . .
And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars ;
Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen :
Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue ;
I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!"

It is joy that he lacks, the joy that makes beauty, and must be within as well as without.

"And I must think, do all I can
That there was pleasure there,"

Wordsworth had written, as he lounged in the Alfoxden grove in springtime ; but now Coleridge was telling him that the sad heart cannot feel the pleasure—

"I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within."

As we read on, we feel that "joy," with its riotous schoolboy associations, is hardly the right word for the inward heaven which Coleridge has lost. "O pure of heart" he cries to his brother poet—

"O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me
What this strong music in the soul may be!
What, and wherein it doth exist,
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
This beautiful and beauty-making power."

If we must call it joy, it is at least

"Joy that ne'er was given,
Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower.

Joy . . . is the spirit and the power,
Which wedding Nature gives to us in dower,
A new Earth and new Heaven,
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud—
Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud—
We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light."

As we go on, we find that it is indeed more than joy, in any vulgar sense of that word, that he has lost—

"Afflictions bow me down to earth;
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
But oh! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination."

Imagination! Let us think what that word stood for to the two poets and critics, and then realize what it was for Coleridge to feel that it was growing powerless within him!

At last the prediction of the lunar omen is fulfilled: the wind comes with its voices, and makes play in the strings of the Æolian harp. Like Browning in *James Lee's Wife*, he tries to interpret the wind's messages; then his sleepless mind travels to Dove Cottage, and asks a blessing for its inmates. He prays that his friend's "joy" may never fail—

"'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:
Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!
Visit him [so we ought to read it] gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,
And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,
May all the stars hang bright above his dwelling,
Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!
With light heart may he rise,
Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,
Joy lift his spirit, joy attune his voice;
To him may all things live, from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of his living soul!
O simple spirit, guided from above,
Dear William, friend devoutest of my choice,
Thus mayest thou ever, evermore rejoice."

Five years later, in another self-pouring, Coleridge told what the Wordsworths had been in his life. He had just heard

Wordsworth read through *The Prelude*, dedicated to himself, and was moved to fresh admiration—admiration at once strengthened and embittered by self-pity and self-contempt. He saw Wordsworth seated—

> "In the choir
> Of ever enduring men."

His song was immortal—

> "Dear shall it be to every human heart,
> To me how more than dearest! me on whom
> Comfort from thee, and utterance of thy love,
> Came with such heights and depths of harmony,
> Such sense of wings uplifting, that its might
> Scatter'd and quell'd me, till my thoughts became
> A bodily tumult; and thy faithful hopes,
> Thy hopes of me, dear friend, by me unfelt!
> Were troublous to me, almost as a voice,
> Familiar once, and more than musical;
> As a dear woman's voice to one cast forth,
> A wanderer with a worn-out heart forlorn,
> Mid strangers pining with untended wounds.
> O Friend, too well thou know'st, of what sad years
> The long suppression had benumb'd my soul,
> That, even as life returns upon the drown'd,
> The unusual joy awoke a throng of pains—
> Keen pangs of Love, awakening, as a babe
> Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart!
> And fears self-will'd that shunn'd the eye of Hope;
> And Hope that scarce would know itself from Fear;
> Sense of past youth, and manhood come in vain,
> And genius given, and knowledge, won in vain,
> And all, which I had cull'd in wood-walks wild,
> And all which patient toil had rear'd, and all
> Commune with *Thee* had opened out—but flowers
> Strew'd on my corse, and burnt upon my bier,
> In the same coffin, for the self-same grave!"

He must break off this egoistic wailing—Byronic, almost, in its last phrasing, but removed from Byronism by its reality and intense sincerity—and think of his generous friend—

> "That way no more!—and ill beseems it me,
> Who came a welcomer, in herald's guise,
> Singing of glory and futurity,
> To wander back on such unhealthful road
> Plucking the poisons of self-harm! Thou, too, Friend,

Impair not thou the memory of that hour
Of thy communion with my nobler mind
By pity or grief, already felt too long!"

Readers of *The Prelude* remember how the connection with Coleridge runs through it like a golden thread. With this mournful echo of Coleridge's self-blame in our ears, we ought to listen to Wordsworth's words, which are equally sincere. "Of thee," he cries—

"Of thee,
Shall I be silent? O capacious Soul!"

When Wordsworth's spirit was wounded and shattered, Coleridge helped to comfort and build it up—

"Placed on this earth to love and understand,
And from thy presence shed the light of love,
Shall I be mute, ere thou be spoken of?
Thy kindred influence [kindred, he means, with Dorothy's, of which he had been speaking before]
Thy kindred influence to my heart of hearts
Did also find its way."

Nay, in this his sincerest moment, he could speak of Coleridge's as a "useful" life, and look forward to its triumph—

"Oh! yet a few short years of useful life,
And all will be complete, thy race be run,
Thy monument of glory will be raised."

We can imagine what it must have been for Coleridge to hear *The Prelude* read through from beginning to end. *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*—in reality, surely, as well in their author's purpose, the central works of his genius and his life—are as truly a product of Grasmere as the shorter poems which reflect its lighter phases. *The Prelude*, begun, as we remember, at the end of the Goslar winter, was completed at Dove Cottage; *The Excursion*, begun, in a sense, at Racedown, was proceeded with at Dove Cottage, though mainly written at Allan Bank. The Grasmere years were a period, not of desultory composition, but of careful logical planning, coherent theories, and acute criticism. Of the criticism we shall hear something in a later chapter; the fruit of all the rest was gathered during the Grasmere years.

Wordsworth's claim to be a philosophical poet rests, not on

this or that passage, this or that attitude of mind, but on his ever present, ever operative sense of the Universe, of the whole of things, as, in his judgment, the fitting theme of poetry. It was the Universe that he meant when he spoke of *Man of Nature, and of Human Life;* and we misconceive him, we do him injustice, if we forget this, and think of him as a narrow, limited, local poet. Yet the misconception is most natural—natural by reason alike of his success and his failure. He was limited and local both by deliberate design and by imperfection, the imperfection that waits on the most aspiring genius, the most all-embracing design.

When Wordsworth locked himself in the recesses of Grasmere, he meant to do a large poetic work for the good of his fellows. He was conscious, as he said, that "an internal brightness" had been granted to him, which he was bound to keep alive; that he had something which might be imparted by power and effort. In boyhood, and beyond it, his ambition had been the ordinary youthful one—

> "to fill
> The heroic trumpet with the Muse's breath!"

in other words, he meditated an epic of the traditional character, a pageant of heroes, a paraphernalia of battle and conquest, a show of *garments rolled in blood.* But when in his maturity he came to Dove Cottage, deliberate self-knowledge told him to look elsewhere for immediate subject-matter. A voice seemed to say—

> "Be mild, and cleave to gentle things,
> Thy glory and thy happiness be there!"

There was to be deliberate and systematic limitation; the gentle things were the pastoral places and folk of Grasmere; but in the limitation there was to be no loss, no depression of purpose, no pettiness of result. There would still be the epic postulates, aspirations, foes, victory—

> "Bounds to be leapt, darkness to be explored."
> "The love,
> The longing, the contempt, the undaunted quest,
> All shall survive, though changed their office, all
> Shall live, it is not in their power to die."

Nor was it only epic grandeur that could be made out of

Grasmere; but here also, by cottage doors, bare hills, and tumbling brooks, was the source of those tremendous abstractions in which the human sense of the Universal expresses itself. Here came the "affecting thoughts" and "dear remembrances" —the "disturbance," as Wordsworth was fond of calling it— which signify that the mind is feeling its way towards "the glory of the sum of things." Here, among lonely shepherds, were the tracks

> "Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
> And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;
> Of blessèd consolations in distress;
> Of moral strength, and intellectual Power;
> Of joy in widest commonalty spread."

Here were individuality, conscience, beauty: here, in a word, were Nature and Human Nature interacting, not less, but more sublimely because the human beings were unsophisticated by a complex civilization. Here, folded in this limited actual, was the boundless ideal; here—

> "A simple produce of the common day,"

were Paradise, Elysian Groves, Fortunate Fields, and all the conventional delights of poesy. It was to be this poet's mission by simple words, free from "poetic diction," "words—

> "Which speak of nothing more than what we are,"

and what the humblest of us are, to win some of the highest triumphs of art; to

> "Arouse the sensual from their sleep
> Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
> To noble raptures."

So far, then, we realize the place of the common in Wordsworth's design; and so far we see nothing debasing to the highest, or impoverishing to the richest, conception of poetry. Yet again and again the reader of Wordsworth feels the limitation as narrowness, the commonness as triviality. He is aware of prejudice and partiality; of austerity where there might without offence be more licence; of severity where there might be indulgence; of bareness where he would fain see tracery and foliage. Beautiful, lovable, fascinating, as is that lakeland from which he makes his ascent towards the Empyrean, with

the emerald of its hillsides quickened by abundance of rain, its wind-swept heaths and majestic cloud-scenery, he longs sometimes for more glowing heat and mellower moons, for nightingale-haunted thickets and a fuller human pulse. And there are moments even when Wordsworth's Universal seems not wholly free from either the illusory or the conventional; when the reader doubts whether it is quite true that the primrose of the rock is a moral agent, and is surprised that a poet so often "disturbed by the joy of elevated thoughts" should be also the poet of some of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, and a contented supporter of Lord Liverpool and Lord Eldon.

The plan on which Wordsworth was to work out his great results was a simple one. He was to compose a large poem called *The Recluse*, expounding the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement. This poem was to be preceded by an autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, showing how the "Recluse" grew out of the child and the boy. With the exception of the First Book, printed in recent editions of Wordsworth, *The Excursion* is all of *The Recluse* that the poet accomplished. The two works were figured by Wordsworth himself as an ante-chapel leading to a Gothic church. But in the design the smaller poems were by no means left out. They had "such connection with the main work as gave them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, primarily included in those edifices."

To begin with the ante-chapel. The fourteen books of *The Prelude* deal with Wordsworth's development as a poet to the stage recorded for us in the conclusion of his Ode on *Intimations of Immortality*. In the last book he portrays the kind of victory, the kind of power, to which through all trials he had been led. He calls it the "power of a majestic intellect"; he calls it "love"; he calls it "liberty." He compares it, as it masters the darkness of things, to the light of a full moon flooding a landscape, such as he had once seen from the top of Snowdon, after climbing in the moonless part of the night. He calls himself

> "A meditative oft a suffering man";

yet his lofty, and perhaps slightly over-complacent, self-respect is the dominant note. To this complacency his education led him; and how he was led appears in the preceding books. The

externals, the mere sources, of influence were school ; Cambridge ; some London life ; France and her Revolution ; the ministration of Dorothy. But the education itself, as unfolded, *e.g.* in Book VIII., *Retrospect*, was the great matter. Wordsworth's phrase describes its essence: *Love of Nature leading to Love of Man*. He tells us first how Nature, as apart from Man, was all in all to him ; and how, as time went on, Humanity also became a source of joy. And when that had fully happened, the work was accomplished, the victory won.

The Excursion is the record, in unrelieved blank verse, of a long walk made by Wordsworth himself in his own neighbourhood, in company with a humble but intellectual and religious man whom he calls *The Wanderer*. The Wanderer represents two most Wordsworthian things—the sober, tranquil joy in the contemplation of Nature and Man which the poet himself had reached ; and, secondly, that unsophisticated peasant's view of the world which Wordsworth considered to be so important and so true. In the course of their walk through the Lake country, the poet and his companion discuss the incidents, the simple and homely incidents, which they encounter : the history of a ruined cottage ; a humble funeral ; talks in Grasmere churchyard with the parson ; the parson at home ; sunset on the lake. As the Wanderer stands for the typical *natural man* according to Wordsworthian ideas, so the whole poem rests on the assumption that simple country life and society in a remote but beautiful neighbourhood is a proper theme for a great poem, because it is the surface of profound philosophic depths.

The antithesis in the early books between the Wanderer and the "Solitary" is full of significance. For the Wanderer is Wordsworth, the early, and also the healed, restored, Wordsworth. On the Wanderer, as on Wordsworth, the spirit of Nature early fell. Like Wordsworth, the Wanderer early found out that Nature is alive. Through the sense of her power, he was led to realize the Love shown forth in her, and from vague awe he went on to something very near worship. Nowhere in Wordsworth is the intercourse between Man and Nature more fully and characteristically expressed than in the following lines :—

> "He had felt the power
> Of Nature, and already was prepared,
> By his intense conceptions, to receive

Deeply the lesson deep of love which he,
Whom Nature, by whatever means, has taught
To feel intensely, cannot but receive.

"Such was the Boy—but for the growing Youth
What soul was his, when, from the naked top
Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
Rise up, and bathe the world in light! He looked—
Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth
And ocean's liquid mass, in gladness lay
Beneath him:—Far and wide the clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces could he read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
Rapt into still communion that transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him; it was blessedness and love!"

But now, on the other hand, the sceptical, pessimistic, Solitary also is Wordsworth, in the second stage of his spiritual experience; Wordsworth shocked, marred, wounded by the spectacle of humanity astray. Read Book III., called *Despondency*, and you find the story of a man first delighted, then disgusted, with the French Revolution, and left with no faith either in religion or in virtue. Read Book IV., called *Despondency Corrected*, and you find the healed and restored Wordsworth arguing with the marred and wounded Wordsworth.

The two books called *The Churchyard among the Mountains* are a direct attempt to make the graves of Grasmere churchyard yield up some of the deepest secrets of universal human nature.

In the last book, and especially at the beginning of it, we get some of the Wanderer's and Wordsworth's philosophy which we could ill afford to do without. We hear of the Universe as *active*, as alive with hope, desire, and effort; we hear of Man, apparently the crown and flower of the Universe, as quick with divine movement which unites childhood with age—

GRASMERE CHURCH

"Ah! why in age
Do we revert so fondly to the walks
Of childhood—but that there the Soul discerns
The near memorial footsteps unimpaired
Of her own native vigour; thence can hear
Reverberations; . . .

"Do not think
That good and wise ever will be allowed,
Though strength decay, to breathe in such estate
As shall divide them wholly from the stir
Of hopeful nature."

Put beside this two other Grasmere poems, the sum and climax of Wordsworth's poetical achievement there, the lines beginning, "My heart leaps up when I behold," and the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, and our image of Wordsworth at his greatest is complete.

CHAPTER VII

A SHIPWRECK

COLERIDGE, though the most important by far of the spirits who sojourned with the Wordsworths at Grasmere, was not their only guest, even in early days. Sometimes Coleridge brought with him a friend of whom he was very proud, and who became *persona grata* at Town End—Humphry Davy, fast becoming recognized as the greatest living chemist. Davy, born in 1778, was some years younger than Wordsworth and Coleridge, and was a prodigy of scientific genius. A Cornishman, he was educated at Penzance and Truro. Then his bent was discovered; and, before he carried his talents on the inevitable journey of all talents, to London, he was, at twenty, made Director of Dr. Beddoes' Pneumatic Institution at Bristol. Coleridge got to know Davy after his return from Germany; and in 1807 he was writing: "I was much with Davey—almost all day." He thought him the most extraordinary young man he had ever met. Davy used to go to Greta Hall to stay with Coleridge, and was, of course, taken over the hills to see the Wordsworths.

Then there were the Clarksons, husband and wife, of whom the former was an impassioned opponent of the slave-trade, and may share with Wilberforce the credit of its eventual overthrow. "Clarkson!" Wordsworth sang in 1807, when the Bill for Abolition became law—

> "Clarkson! it was an obstinate hill to climb:
> How toilsome—nay, how dire—it was, by thee
> Is known; by none, perhaps, so feelingly:
> But thou, who, starting in thy fervent prime,
> Didst first lead forth that enterprise sublime,
> Hast heard the constant Voice its charge repeat,
> Which, out of thy young heart's oracular seat,
> First roused thee.—O true yoke-fellow of Time,

Duty's intrepid liegeman, see, the palm
Is won, and by all Nations shall be worn !
The blood-stained Writing is for ever torn ;
And thou henceforth wilt have a good man's calm,
A great man's happiness ; thy zeal shall find
Repose at length, firm friend of human kind ! "

Clarkson had a farm near Ullswater on which he had built a house ; and there were frequent meetings with the Wordsworths, evenings with a quiet game of cards, or rides about the misty hills, Clarkson on his little galloway. Charles Lloyd, Coleridge's and Lamb's Birmingham friend, who had settled down as a "Laker," lived at Brathay, under Loughrigg, and was often at Dove Cottage.

In 1803, Coleridge took to the Cottage Sir George Beaumont, of Coleorton in Leicestershire, a descendant of the dramatist, and a painter of some repute, a noble and generous man, if not a great artist ; and a lifelong friendship began which has left deep marks both on Wordsworth's biography and poetry. Beaumont was born in 1753, and was thus fifty when he made Wordsworth's acquaintance. He came to the Lakes for their beauty's sake, and was often at Grasmere between 1803 and 1806. He loved both Coleridge and Wordsworth, and was eager to promote their friendship and mutual helpfulness. With these things in view, he bought a small estate at Applethwaite, near Greta Hall, on which he wished the Wordsworths to live. Though they never did so, Wordsworth kept the estate, making it over to his daughter Dora.

The friendship with this gracious, wealthy, and gifted man and his like-minded wife was one of Wordsworth's best possessions. Coleorton, four miles south-east of Ashby-de-la-Zouche, was a pleasant resort of men of letters and artists. In 1806 and 1807 Beaumont was building a new house and laying out new grounds. He occupied a farmhouse on the estate, and this house he lent to the Wordsworths in the winter of 1806–7, their family having increased beyond the possibilities of comfortable housing at Dove Cottage. Wordsworth was an adept at landscape-gardening ; and at Coleorton he not only walked up and down composing poetry as usual, but gave advice as to walks, summer-houses, and the like. He wrote to Lady Beaumont of the spring-days of 1807—

"Lady! the songs of spring were in the grove
While I was shaping beds for winter flowers,
While I was planting green unfading bowers,
And shrubs to hang upon the warm alcove,
And sheltering wall; and still, as fancy wove
The dream, to time and nature's blended powers
I gain this paradise for winter hours,
A labyrinth, lady! which your feet shall rove.
Yes! when the sun of life more feebly shines,
Becoming thoughts, I trust, of solemn gloom
Or of high gladness you shall hither bring;
And these perennial bowers and murmuring pines
Be gracious as the music and the bloom
And all the mighty ravishment of spring."

Beaumont lived till 1827. He was not a great painter, but he was a great patron of art, for from his collection and his generosity sprang the National Gallery.

But of all the guests, the dearest and the most sacred was the earliest, the sailor-brother John, who first walked over into Grasmere with Wordsworth and Coleridge, and who stayed with William and Dorothy at Dove Cottage until he had to go to join his ship on September 29, 1800. Those nine months—"eight blessed months," his brother afterwards called them—were long enough to make him a permanent feature of the new life; they were long enough to endear Grasmere to one who, albeit a brave and competent sailor, had a poet's sensibility and a poet's heart. Dorothy's Journal tells a good deal of John's share in the happy summer life, of the walkings and bathings and fishings that went on. It tells also of the moment of parting "in sight of Ullswater": "John left us . . . It was a fine day, showery, but with sunshine and fine clouds. Poor fellow, my heart was right sad! I could not help thinking we should see him again, because he was only going to Penrith."

When John was alone, he specially cared to walk in a fir-plantation behind and above the Cottage—that fir-plantation towards White-moss which all three liked so well. After he was gone the others realized how much he had paced there alone, when the wind teased beyond the shelter; they found a path, a quarter-deck path, which could have been worn by none other than his sailor's feet. Now that he had gone back to the ocean, that silent track seemed eloquent of him and consecrated to his memory; reminiscence was bringing affection within sight

of the limits of passion. Emotion was not only "recollected," but born "in tranquillity"; imagination and idealization were at work. While the brothers were living together, they were affectionate brothers, but no more; when one was gone his image came "more moving-delicate and full of life" than when they were under the same roof. In the fir-wood—henceforward "John's Grove"—William began to realize his brother in idealizing him. *He* seemed the poet, though inarticulate; the man of finer sensibility.

"In the shady grove
Pleasant conviction flashed upon my mind
That, to this opportune recess allured,
He had surveyed it with a finer eye,
A heart more wakeful; and had worn the track
By pacing here, unwearied and alone,
In that habitual restlessness of foot
That haunts the Sailor measuring o'er and o'er
His short domain upon the vessel's deck,
. . . . . .
When thou had'st quitted Esthwaite's pleasant shore
. . . . . .
Year followed year, my Brother! and we two
Conversing not, knew little in what mould
Each other's mind was fashioned; and at length,
When once again we met in Grasmere Vale,
Between us there was little other bond
Than common feelings of fraternal love.
But thou, a Schoolboy, to the sea hadst carried
Undying recollections! Nature there
Was with thee; she, who loved us both, she still
Was with thee; and even so didst thou become
A *silent* Poet; from the solitude
Of the vast sea didst bring a watchful heart
Still couchant, an inevitable ear,
And an eye practis'd like a blind man's touch.
Back to the joyless Ocean thou art gone;
Nor from this vestige of thy musing hours
Could I withhold thy honour'd name,—and now
I love the fir-grove with a perfect love."

A wireless telegraphy of love seemed to play between the fir-grove and the ship at sea.

"While I gaze . . .
I think on thee
My Brother, and on all which thou hast lost.

Nor seldom, if I rightly guess, while Thou,
Muttering the verses which I muttered first
Among the mountains, through the midnight watch
Art pacing thoughtfully the vessel's deck
In some far region, here, while o'er my head,
At every impulse of the moving breeze,
The fir-grove murmurs with a sea-like sound,
Alone I tread this path ;—for aught I know,
Timing my steps to thine : and with a store
Of undistinguishable sympathies,
Mingling most earnest wishes for the day
When we, and others whom we love, shall meet
A second time, in Grasmere's happy Vale."

These earnest wishes were for something more than a mere brief sailor's visit. It was John's purpose to leave the sea as soon as he had made a competence, to bid it farewell, and to settle at Grasmere, adding his means to the slender capital of William and Dorothy. Meanwhile, after the parting on Michaelmas Day, 1800, his sea life ran smoothly. He joined the *Earl of Abergavenny*, East Indiaman—"The finest ship in the fleet," he wrote to his sister ; but much of his heart was left at Grasmere. Just before he sailed in the spring of 1801, Wordsworth brought out the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. In this, and in his brother's poetry in general, John was deeply interested ; he was sensitive to its unpopularity, and confident of its essential merit and ultimate success. "Few people," he wrote, "*read* poetry ; they *buy* it for the name, read about twenty lines, and if the language is very fine, they are content with praising the whole. Most of William's poetry *improves upon the second, third, or fourth reading*. Now, people in general are not sufficiently interested to try a second reading." And again, "The poems will become popular *in time*, but it will be *by degrees*." "My brother's poetry has a great deal to struggle against ; but I hope it will overcome all : it is certainly *founded upon Nature, and that is the best foundation*." And finally, "I do not give myself the smallest concern about them [*Lyrical Ballads*]. I am certain they must sell."

Between 1801 and 1804 the *Earl of Abergavenny* made two successful voyages to the far East, and before a third was entered on John Wordsworth was put in command of her. William saw him once in London, but there was never time for

John to go to Westmorland. On one early day in February, the *Abergavenny* left Portsmouth on what the brothers hoped would have been John's last voyage. It was; but not as they hoped. On the way down Channel an unskilful pilot was on board; and in the afternoon of February 5 the ship went aground off Portland Bill. In a few hours she was a total wreck, the greater part of the crew being drowned, and Captain Wordsworth going down "with apparent cheerfulness," "in the very place and point where his duty stationed him."

In the dark February days the burden of these heavy tidings fell on the little household at Grasmere. There is a soul of goodness in things evil; and the Wordsworths' loss was the world's gain. For this tragedy drew from Wordsworth, not only two or three of his most beautiful poems, but a note of passion deeper and more thrilling than that evoked by anything else in his life—even marriage, even his love for Dorothy. The passion is felt, not only in the verse, but in the intensity of the mourning, which gives a passing eloquence to his frigid and sapless epistolary style. In that year 1805, when the blow came, Wordsworth was in the most perfect maturity of his genius. He had finished *The Prelude*, he had finished the *Immortality Ode;* it was the year of the *Ode to Duty*, of *The Waggoner;* he had just completed some of his most beautiful Grasmere work, and his first series of great sonnets. The feeling of a great poet at the height of his powers was stirred to its deepest depths; imagination kindled every spark of reminiscence into a glowing flame.

Dorothy wrote to a friend— "It does me good to weep for him. . . . My consolations come to me . . . in gusts of feeling. . . . I know it will not always be so. The time will come when the light of the setting sun upon these mountain-tops will be as heretofore, a pure joy; not the same *gladness*—that can never be—but yet a joy even more tender. . . . Pure he was, and innocent as a child. . . . The stars and moon were his chief delight. He made of them his companions when he was at sea, and was never tired of those thoughts which the silence of the night fed in him." "My poor sister," Wordsworth wrote to Sir George Beaumont, "and my wife, who loved him almost as we did . . . are in miserable affliction, which I do all in my power to alleviate; but Heaven knows I want

consolation myself. . . . I can say nothing higher of my ever-dear brother, than that he was worthy of his sister, who is now weeping beside me, and of the friendship of Coleridge; meek, affectionate, silently enthusiastic, loving all quiet things, and a poet in everything but words."

"I shall never forget him," he wrote, some days later, "never lose sight of him. There is a bond between us yet, the same as if he were living, nay, far more sacred, calling upon me to do my utmost, as he to the last did his utmost, to live in honour and worthiness. . . . Do not think our grief unreasonable. Of all human beings whom I ever knew, he was the man of the most rational desires, the most sedate habits, and the most perfect self-command. He was modest and gentle, and shy even to disease; but this was wearing off. In everything his judgments were sound and original; his taste in all the arts, music and poetry in particular . . . was exquisite; and his eye for the beauties of Nature was as fine and delicate as ever poet or painter was gifted with, in some discriminations, owing to his education and way of life, far superior to any person's I ever knew. But alas! what avails it? It was the will of God that he should be taken away. . . . A thousand times have I asked myself . . . why was he taken away? . . . Why have we a choice and a will, and a notion of justice and injustice enabling us to be moral agents? Why have we sympathies that make the best of us so afraid of inflicting pain and sorrow, which yet we see dealt about so lavishly by the supreme Governor? . . . Would it not be blasphemy to say that, upon the supposition of the thinking principle being *destroyed by death*, however inferior we may be to the great Cause and Ruler of things, we have *more of love* in our nature than He has? . . . As to my departed brother, who leads our minds at present to these reflections, he walked all his life pure among many impure. . . . In prudence, in meekness, in self-denial, in fortitude, in just desires and elegant and refined enjoyments, with an entire simplicity of manners, life, and habit, he was all that could be wished for in man; strong in health, and of a noble person, with every hope about him that could render life dear, thinking of, and living only for, others—and we see what has been his end! So good must be better; so high must be destined to be higher."

Two more sentences, and we may take leave of these

elegiacs in prose. "For myself," he wrote, more than a month after the catastrophe, "I feel that there is something cut out of my life that cannot be restored. . . . But let me stop! I will not be cast down; were it only for his sake, I will not be dejected. I have much yet to do, and pray God to give me strength and power: his [John's] part of the agreement between us is brought to an end, mine continues; and I hope, when I shall be able to think of him with a calmer mind, that the remembrance of him dead will even animate me more than the joy which I had in him living."

The poetry born of the tragedy is as various as it is beautiful. First of all, memory went back to the parting on Michaelmas Day, 1800, the parting "in sight of Ullswater" commemorated in Dorothy's Journal. The exact spot was near Grisdale Tarn, out of which the Grisdale stream flows down north-eastward to Patterdale and Ullswater among the wild hills between Fairfield and Helvellyn. The ground is high enough to be covered with the bright green leaves and pink and white flowers of *Silene acaulis*, the moss campion. Full of his sorrow, Wordsworth went back to the place while the plant was in flower. At a shepherd's whistle, a buzzard sailed into the air; "could it but have lent its wings," he thought passionately, "to save those sailors!" Then from the bird with its strong and free flight, he turned to the earth-clinging plant, and found in it a type of the calmness he needed. His mind travelled back over the five years—

> "Here did we stop; and here looked round
> While each into himself descends
> For that last thought of parting Friends
> That is not to be found.
> Hidden was Grasmere Vale from sight,
> Our home and his, his heart's delight,
> His quiet heart's selected home.
> But time before him melts away,
> And he hath feeling of a day
> Of blessedness to come."

The next thought was of the shock of the bad news—

> "Full soon in sorrow did I weep,
> Taught that the mutual hope was dust,
> In sorrow, but for higher trust,
> How miserably deep!

All vanished in a single word,
A breath, a sound, and scarcely heard ;
Sea—Ship—drowned—Shipwreck—so it came,
The meek, the brave, the good, was gone ;
He who had been our living John
Was nothing but a name."

Well, and what comes out of it all? Only the kind of consolation, so sober and so reasonable, which Wordsworth alone has made known to us—the kind of consolation which Shelley, too, felt when he spoke of Adonais as "made one with Nature." The very plant at his feet, humble, beautiful, *calm*, comforts him—

"From many a humble source, to pains
Like these, there comes a mild release ;
Even here I feel it, even this Plant
Is in its beauty ministrant
To comfort and to peace.

"He would have loved thy modest grace,
Meek Flower ! "

Such "blessed consolations in distress" cannot be explained, cannot be even justified, to a carping and sneering scepticism. It is enough that they may be felt by those who are pure enough and serene enough to feel them.

With his beloved daisy, too, he must needs link the thought of his sorrow, the very narrative of his loss.

If John *would* have loved the moss campion, he *had* loved the daisy. And now the daisies grow on his grave at Wyke Regis!—

"He who was on land, at sea,
My Brother, too, in loving thee,
Although he loved more silently,
Sleeps by his native shore."

The successful cruises were made ; in the intervals the sailor rejoiced in English grass and flowers—

"But, when a third time from the land
They parted, sorrow was at hand
For Him and for his crew.
. . . . . .
"Six weeks beneath the moving sea
He lay in slumbe quietly ;
Unforced by wind or wave

To quit the Ship for which he died,
(All claims of duty satisfied ;)
And there they found him at her side ;
And bore him to the grave.

"Vain service ! yet not vainly done
For this, if other end were none
That He, who had been cast
Upon a way of life unmeet
For such a gentle soul and sweet,
Should find an undisturbed retreat
Near what he loved, at last—

"That neighbourhood of grove and field
To Him a resting-place should yield,
A meek man and a brave !
The birds shall sing and ocean make
A mournful murmur for *his* sake ;
And Thou, sweet Flower, shalt sleep and wake,
Upon his senseless grave."

A yet deeper note was struck out of association with one of Sir George Beaumont's pictures. It was of Peel Castle in the Isle of Man, painted as in a storm. Wordsworth, as a boy, had spent a summer month close to the castle, but had seen it only in calm weather. Looking at the turbulent picture, and contrasting it with his own recollections, he, after his fashion, extends and moralizes the contrast. It was a contrast never far from his central thought, the contrast between the unthinking, non-human estimate of life and Nature on the one hand, and the reflective estimate on the other, made when the worst of human ill has been faced. It was present to him in the grove at Alfoxden ; at Tintern Abbey ; it is the under-note of all *The Prelude.* The picture of Peel Castle in a storm brings it sharply out. The death of John Wordsworth, in circumstances so tragic—the first keen personal grief in William's experience—was fresh "sad music of humanity," only this time not "still," but shrill and keen, "wild with all regret." It made an epoch ; never again could the poet be what he was before. Yet in his poem he is hardly egoistic ; the poem is one of art rather than of ethics or autobiography. For art's sake primarily, he is thankful that the impression of his childhood, made more vivid by illusion—"the light that never was on sea or land"—has not been stereotyped by the painter, and

imposed on the world as final symbolic truth. "A sea that could not cease to smile," "a sky of bliss"—how partial a truth, how inadequate to the deepest fact, the deepest beauty, of things! Yet had Wordsworth himself been the painter before his sorrows, before this last sorrow, he would have uttered this lying half-truth—

> "Thou shouldst have seemed a treasure-house divine
> Of peaceful years; a chronicle of heaven;—
> Of all the sunbeams that did ever shine
> The very sweetest had to thee been given.
>
> "A Picture had it been of lasting ease,
> Elysian quiet, without toil or strife;
> No motion but the moving tide, a breeze,
> Or merely silent Nature's breathing life."

But the actual painter's hand has been guided to the true picture. The poet hails the symbolism with passionate acclamation—

> "This work of thine I blame not, but commend;
> This sea in anger, and that dismal shore."

As the moss campion, carpeting the heights by Grisdale Tarn had been to the bereaved man a type of restored calm, the castle was a type of the indefeasible, the impregnable by adversity, by "the fierce confederate storm of sorrow"—

> "And this huge Castle, standing here sublime,
> I love to see the look with which it braves,
> Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time,
> The lightning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves."

Yet the note on which the poem dies away is far from being one of stoical defiance. It is not because the picture shows mere unflinching resistance to the blows of fate that it is so much to Wordsworth. It is because it shows what Humanity adds to Nature, and how from the utmost human pain there is release.

> "Welcome each rebuff
> That turns earth's smoothness rough!"

was Browning's cheery, brusque exclamation. Wordsworth's is deeper and more passionate, if more restrained; and, though apparently at war with optimism, not less alive with faith—

"Farewell, farewell the heart that lives alone,
Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind!
Such happiness, wherever it be known,
Is to be pitied; for 'tis surely blind.

"But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
And frequent sights of what is to be borne!
Such sights, or worse, as are before me here.—
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn."

In October, 1805, Nelson died at Trafalgar; and in the next year Wordsworth was moved to put something of his character into verse. The conception of "a happy warrior," of a fighting man who might yet realize himself at his best, and be a kind of philosopher or saint in armour, filled the poet's mind and occupied his imagination. But though, as he reflected and imagined, he thought much of Nelson, he thought more of his brother John. Nelson's private life was too much blurred for a poet like Wordsworth to idealize the man completely. The philosopher in action was more nearly realized by John, who had a warrior's heart, and would fain have fought his country's battles. And so, thinking mainly of his brother, the poet puts his great question—

"Who is the happy Warrior? Who is he
That every man in arms should wish to be?"

and proceeds to answer it so nobly, so sonorously, and with such unity and close sequence of thought, that one must quote the whole—

"It is the generous spirit, who, when brought
Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought
Upon the plan that pleased his boyish thought:
Whose high endeavours are an inward light
That makes the path before him always bright:
Who, with a natural instinct to discern
What knowledge can perform, is diligent to learn;
Abides by this resolve, and stops not there,
But makes his moral being his prime care;
Who, doomed to go in company with Pain,
And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!
Turns his necessity to glorious gain;
In face of these doth exercise a power
Which is our human nature's highest dower;

Controls them, and subdues, transmutes, bereaves
Of their bad influence, and their good receives:
By objects, which might force the soul to abate
Her feeling, rendered more compassionate;
Is placable—because occasions rise
So often that demand such sacrifice;
More skilful in self-knowledge, even more pure,
As tempted more; more able to endure,
As more exposed to suffering and distress;
Thence, also, more alive to tenderness.
—'Tis he whose law is reason; who depends
Upon that law as on the best of friends;
Whence, in a state where men are tempted still
To evil for a guard against worse ill,
And what in quality or act is best
Doth seldom on a right foundation rest,
He labours good on good to fix, and owes
To virtue every triumph that he knows:
—Who, if he rise to station of command,
Rises by open means; and there will stand
On honourable terms, or else retire,
And in himself possess his own desire;
Who comprehends his trust, and to the same
Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim;
And therefore does not stoop, nor lie in wait
For wealth, or honours, or for worldly state;
Whom they must follow; on whose head must fall,
Like showers of manna, if they come at all:
Whose powers shed round him in the common strife,
Or mild concerns of ordinary life,
A constant influence, a peculiar grace;
But who, if he be called upon to face
Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
Is happy as a Lover; and attired
With sudden brightness, like a Man inspired;
And, through the heat of conflict, keeps the law
In calmness made, and sees what he foresaw;
Or if an unexpected call succeed,
Come when it will, is equal to the need:
—He who, though thus endued as with a sense
And faculty for storm and turbulence,
Is yet a soul whose master-bias leans
To home-felt pleasures and to gentle scenes;
Sweet images! which, wheresoe'er he be,
Are at his heart; and such fidelity
It is his darling passion to approve;
More brave for this, that he hath much to love!—

'Tis, finally, the Man, who, lifted high,
Conspicuous object in a Nation's eye,
Or left unthought-of in obscurity,—
Who, with a toward or untoward lot,
Prosperous or adverse, to his wish or not,—
Plays, in the many games of life, that one
Where what he most doth value may be won:
Whom neither shape of danger can dismay,
Nor thought of tender happiness betray;
Who, not content that former worth stand fast,
Looks forward, persevering to the last,
From well to better, daily self-surpast:
Who, whether praise of him must walk the earth
For ever, and to noble deeds give birth,
Or he must fall, to sleep without his fame,
And leave a dead unprofitable name,—
Finds comfort in himself, and in his cause;
And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause:
This is the happy Warrior; this is He
That every Man in arms should wish to be."

CHAPTER VIII

THE POET AS CRITIC AND POLITICIAN

IT was to Dove Cottage that Wordsworth brought his wife, Mary Hutchinson, in October, 1802. We remember how William and Dorothy went over into Yorkshire to fetch her, and the *Farewell* to beloved Grasmere which William wrote before they started. There was more romance in the *Farewell* than in the marriage. A cool temperature brooded over the admirable arrangement by which Wordsworth, at thirty-two, made his Penrith playmate and affectionate lifelong friend into his wife and other self. The brother and sister started on their journey in July; and between their departure and the wedding came their memorable visit to Calais,—memorable, because, as we shall see before this chapter is finished, it stirred Wordsworth into a poetry of society and politics, as great, in its way, as any of his poetry of Nature. After a little supplementary touring by William and Dorothy about England, the marriage took place in Brompton Church, near the Hutchinsons' home at Gallow Hill in Yorkshire, between Scarborough and Pickering. Dorothy seems to have been the only member of the Wordsworth family who was there, and even she was not present at the quiet wedding before breakfast. She contented herself with looking from her bedroom window at the party going down the avenue to church, and falling on her beloved William's bosom when he came back, a married man. One is reminded of the Carlyles' wedding-journey, and of the indispensableness of "brother John's" company to the bridegroom's happiness, when one reads that Dorothy accompanied her brother and his wife in the first drive of the honeymoon towards Grasmere. They made a placid and happy trio, rolling along through "sunshine and showers, pleasant talk, love and cheerfulness."

They walked about, still a trio, during the halt for luncheon; walked in the churchyard at Kirby, "and read the gravestones." And so on, through the three days, by Helmsley, and Hawes and Garsdale, to Kendal and home. "We arrived at Grasmere," Dorothy writes in her journal, "at about six o'clock on Wednesday evening, the 6th of October, 1802. I cannot describe what I felt. We went by candle light into the garden, and were astonished at the growth of the brooms, Portugal laurels, etc. The next day, we unpacked the boxes. On Friday 8, Mary and I walked first upon the hillside, and then in John's Grove, then in view of Rydal, the first walk that I had, taken with my sister."

It is a homely and temperate story; but happy marriage, fortunately, requires neither romance nor fever. And happy marriage William and Mary Wordsworth assuredly achieved. Romance or no, the husband of three years' standing who can sing of his wife as Wordsworth did of his, and with an accent of sincerity so clear through the lovely words, is a happy man.

"She was a phantom of delight:" we need not quote the rest. Other poems have much the same burden. In *The Prelude* the poet recurs to the ideas and words of the lyric just cited, and thinks of his wife's presence as no *ignis fatuus*, but an abiding glow, lighting up the heart.

> "She came, no more a phantom to adorn
> A moment, but an inmate of the heart,
> And yet a spirit there for me enshrined
> To penetrate the lofty and the low;
> Even as one essence of pervading light
> Shines in the brightest of ten thousand stars,
> And the meek worm that finds her lonely lamp
> Couched in the dewy grass."

Dedicating to her *The White Doe of Rylstone* many years later in Spenserian stanzas, he recalls happy evenings of companionship at Dove Cottage when the three (for Dorothy was always there) read Spenser together, and commemorates his wife's love of *The Doe* as its story was unfolded. Nor did the deep and tranquil poetry of married life lose itself in the marshes of habit or the dry wastes of age. Wordsworth's most beautiful lines about his wife were written when he was between fifty and sixty, and had been more than twenty years married.

The following holds high rank in the anthology of wedded love—

"O dearer far than light and life are dear,
Full oft our human foresight I deplore;
Trembling, through my unworthiness, with fear,
That friends, by death disjoined, may meet no more!

"Misgivings, hard to vanquish or control,
Mix with the day, and cross the hour of rest;
While all the future, for thy purer soul,
With 'sober certainties' of love is blest.

"That sigh of thine, not meant for human ear,
Tells that these words thy humbleness offend;
Yet bear me up—else faltering in the rear
Of a steep march: support me to the end.

"Peace settles where the intellect is meek,
And Love is dutiful in thought and deed;
Through thee communion with that Love I seek:
The faith Heaven strengthens where *he* moulds the Creed."

Mrs. Wordsworth was supposed not to be beautiful, nor did even her husband claim perfection for her.

"Heed not tho' none should call thee fair"

he exhorted her; and he bid her rejoice that she was not angelic. In an atrabilious mood, Carlyle, who saw her when she was growing an old woman, wrote of her as "a small, withered, puckered, winking lady." When she was elderly, and already, in her close-set cap, looked old, her portrait was painted by Margaret Gillies. The picture is a beautiful one; the eyes that look up under thick brows are gentle and modest; the mouth, prematurely sunken, has a comforting sweetness. At first the picture was a trial to Wordsworth, who would fain have had the likeness of her youth.

"'Tis a fruitless task to paint for me
Who, yielding not to changes Time has made,
By the habitual light of memory see
Eyes unbedimmed, see bloom that cannot fade,
And smiles that from their birthplace ne'er shall flee,
Into the land where ghosts and phantoms be."

In time, however, he was able to reach a better construction

MRS. WORDSWORTH

BY MARGARET GILLIES

of the facts, and to realize that his love was poised on nothing so frail as mere youth.

> "O, my Beloved, I have done thee wrong,
> Conscious of blessedness, but, whence it sprung,
> Even too heedless, as I now perceive;
> Morn into noon did pass, noon into eve,
> And the old day was welcome as the young,
> As welcome and as beautiful—in sooth
> More beautiful, as being a thing more holy;
> Thanks to thy virtues, to the eternal youth
> Of all thy goodness, never melancholy;
> To thy large heart and humble mind, that cast
> Into one vision, future, present, past."

De Quincey's well-known impressions of Mrs. Wordsworth in 1807 must be given for what they are worth. They agree with all that we know and can infer from other sources. Standing in the kitchen-parlour at Dove Cottage, De Quincey saw two ladies enter the room. "The foremost, a tallish young woman, with the most winning expression of benignity on her features; advanced to me, presenting her hand with so frank an air, that all embarrassment must have fled in a moment before the native goodness of her manner. This was Mrs. Wordsworth. . . . She furnished a remarkable proof how possible it is for a woman neither handsome nor even comely . . . to exercise all the practical fascination of beauty, through the mere compensatory charms of sweetness all but angelic, of simplicity the most entire, womanly self-respect and purity of heart speaking through all her looks, acts, and movements. *Words*, I was going to have added; but her words were few. In reality, she talked so little, that Mr. Slave-Trade Clarkson used to allege against her, that she could only say, '*God bless you!*' Certainly, her intellect was not of an active order; but in a quiescent, reposing, meditative way, she appeared always to have a genial enjoyment from her own thoughts; and it would have been strange indeed if she, who enjoyed such eminent advantages of training, from the daily society of her husband and his sister, failed to acquire some power of judging for herself, and putting forth some functions of activity. But undoubtedly that was not her element: to feel and to enjoy in a luxurious repose of mind—there was her *forte* and her peculiar privilege. . . . Her figure was

tolerably good. In complexion she was fair, and there was something peculiarly pleasing even in this accident of the skin, for it was accompanied by an animated expression of health, a blessing which, in fact, she possessed uninterruptedly." Even a slight squint, De Quincey tells us, was no deformity in her face. "All faults, had they been ten times more and greater, would have been neutralized by that supreme expression of her features, to the unity of which every lineament in the fixed parts, and every undulation in the moving parts of her countenance, concurred, viz. a sunny benignity—a radiant graciousness —such as in this world I never saw surpassed."

The Wordsworths' union was perfected by children, all five of whom were born at Grasmere. There were three sons and two daughters, who came in the following order :—

John, June 18, 1803.
Dorothy (Dora), August 16, 1804.
Thomas, June 16, 1806.
Catharine, September 6, 1808.
William, May 12, 1810.

Only the first two and the youngest lived to grow up: Catharine and Thomas both died in 1812, their loss darkening the last year at Grasmere. Katy was drooping in 1811, and a family journey in search of reviving air was made from Grasmere Rectory, into which the Wordsworths had just moved, to Bootle, on the Cumbrian coast. Wordsworth has described the journey in his *Epistle to Sir George Beaumont*. Katy was much loved, and was one of her father's many studies in the poetry of childhood. He wrote of her in the Bootle year :—

"Loving she is, and tractable, though wild ;
And Innocence hath privilege in her
To dignify arch looks and laughing eyes,
And feats of cunning ; and the pretty round
Of trespasses, affected to provoke
Mock-chastisement and partnership in play.
And, as a faggot sparkles on the hearth,
Not less if unattended and alone
Than when both young and old sit gathered round
And take delight in its activity ;
Even so this happy Creature of herself
Is all-sufficient, solitude to her
Is blithe society, who fills the air
With gladness and involuntary songs."

The visit to Bootle did little good: Katy was marked for death; and in June, 1812, death took her. Six months later, struck down by the *sequelæ* of measles, went her little brother Tom, who, in the autumn, used to sweep the leaves from Katy's grave. The following year the Wordsworths left Grasmere.

A sonnet, curiously reminiscent of his little dead daughter, and one of the finest of his rare outbreaks of passionate feeling, was written by Wordsworth years after. In a lapse of memory —a momentary trance of keen emotion—he felt himself turning for sympathy to Katy, so long "earth in earth" by Grasmere Church. What a lapse, what a treachery of love!

> "Surprised by joy—impatient as the Wind
> I turned to share the transport—Oh! with whom
> But Thee, deep buried in the silent tomb,
> That spot which no vicissitude can find?
> Love, faithful love, recalled thee to my mind—
> But how could I forget thee? Through what power,
> Even for the least division of an hour,
> Have I been so beguiled as to be blind
> To my most grievous loss?—That thought's return
> Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,
> Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,
> Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more;
> That neither present time, nor years unborn,
> Could to my sight that heavenly face restore."

Two phases of Wordsworth's Grasmere life remain for more heed than we have yet given to them.

1. Wordsworth, we already realize, was a literary critic, and a literary critic of no small importance. By his criticism, quite as much as by his poetry—and more, perhaps, than by any personal association—he was in touch with others, a member of a circle. For the Romantic Revival had its criticism as well as its poetry—criticism with which it justified and fortified itself, as well as criticism which it provoked, and which tried to hinder it. It was a criticism rich and various, a criticism of different parentages and different phases, of splendid individuallty as well as of loyalty to tradition.

The last word of true eighteenth-century criticism—the criticism which began its maturity in Dryden—was spoken in Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*. One may call it on the whole a criticism of *appraisement according to tradition:* writers, writings,

were judged from a superior standpoint, and were acquitted or condemned by standards set, or supposed to be set, by Aristotle and an orthodox succession descending from him. There were, of course, modifications of the prevalent tone. The two most eminent critics of the school, Dryden and Johnson, diluted tradition by large wholesome draughts of common sense. In the mid-time of the school's vogue critics appeared like the Wartons, who tried to base judgment on admiration rather than approval. Addison's criticism was not as wholly "based on convention" as Matthew Arnold taught us it was. But even the *Lives of the Poets*, wonderful as is their catholicity, admirable their conscientiousness, and unfailing their reasonableness, are *judicial*—a collection of verdicts and sentences; and the time had come for a new criticism based on *appreciation*, a criticism living, like humanity itself, "by admiration, hope, and love."

Such a criticism was supplied, most conspicuously, by Charles Lamb and Coleridge. Both those great critics showed themselves wholly free from conventional trammels and "Augustan" models, and rediscovered the true classics of English literature. They refused to date English poetry from the close of the Elizabethan age; they refused to make any kind of apologies for Shakespeare. Charles Lamb rediscovered the Elizabethans, felt the human heart beating through them, made them speak for themselves afresh to English readers. Coleridge brought to the interpretation of Shakespeare—and of how many besides!—the opulent resources of his subtle and original mind. Nor, standing not very far from these giants, ought William Hazlitt to be overlooked. It is often from the lesser men who represent a movement that we learn most about the movement itself. And Hazlitt was no petty critic or writer; he was more a critic by profession than Lamb or Coleridge; he brought to his work a whole-hearted devotion, and, when his thought was not deflected by petulant moods and party-spirit, a broad rational appreciativeness, a fearless candour, a wealth of eloquent expression, which are an honour to letters.

Much of the new criticism might have been called, and was considered, mere "mutual admiration." According to that other school of critics associated with the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, and to some extent with *Blackwood*, the best criticism

which England had yet produced was only the self-advertisement of a clique of incompetent and tiresome poets. The criticism of Jeffrey and the rest was not without its merit; but it was, like the characteristic eighteenth-century criticism, delivered *de haut en bas;* it was criticism of approval or disapproval, not of sympathy and reverence; and it was spoiled by the bad standard of a misused tradition. The "mutual admiration" of the other critics, who appreciated Wordsworth without prejudice and without flattery, who admired him generously without losing sight of any of his short-comings, was an insight which posterity has fully ratified.

The solitary and self-involved Wordsworth had nothing to do with mutual admiration. His criticism, partly apologetic, partly revolutionary, dealt with abstract principles rather than with particular works or particular writers. It falls into rank with the critical work of Coleridge, but of Coleridge the literary theorist rather than Coleridge the literary critic proper. Indeed, as we have already seen, Coleridge's philosophy of poetry, his body of poetic theory, in great measure owes its origin to Wordsworth's influence, an influence often antagonistic.

Wordsworth's criticism was the fruit of a nature essentially and constitutionally philosophic. He was no keen natural lover of books like Lamb or Hazlitt, but an intense believer in the unity of apparently divergent things, and acutely jealous for the honour of poesy, his own art. It is to be found chiefly in the preface to the second issue of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800; in an appendix-note on Poetic Diction to the third issue in 1802; and in the preface to the first collected edition of the poems in 1815. The last-named has a Supplementary Essay of the same date.

The first preface is the true critical counterpart of Wordsworth's strongest young poetry. He meant the two to be complementary: the poetry was to exemplify the theory, and the theory to explain the poetry. The specific objects of the 1800 preface were two: (1) to defend the style of *Lyrical Ballads;* (2) to define and defend poetry.

(1) The defence of *Lyrical Ballads* resolves itself into the defence of that extremely plain diction which so scandalized the world. We already know the main lines of the argument: the poet chose themes taken from ordinary life and simple humanity,

and dealt with them in language formed out of the ordinary speech of men and women. The resultant poetry was to be coloured by imagination only, and surcharged with emotion. Why this choice and method? Why does the poet go, why ought he to go, to common, and especially to rural, life for his material and his medium? Because, he maintains, men and Nature there are in their interrelation simpler and less sophisticated than when they have undergone elaborate civilization. And the central principle of his art has been that *feeling should "give importance to" action and situation*, and not *vice versâ*.

This principle deserves a moment's consideration. According to Wordsworth, the poet has for his characteristic endowment and power *feeling*, *i.e.* thought prompted and accompanied by emotion, so prompted by emotion as at times to seem posterior to it in time—

> "In such high hour
> Of visitation from the living God
> Thought was not;"

so Wordsworth himself sang of a moment before thought was born. Thus endowed, the poet takes the Universe for his province; but he holds it as God holds it, with an equality of regard which transcends all ordinary human notions of size and degree.

> "Say not 'a small event!' Why 'small'?
> Costs it more pain that this, ye call
> A 'great event,' should come to pass,
> Than that? Untwine me from the mass
> Of deeds which make up life, one deed
> Power shall fall short in or exceed!"

Browning's words seem to catch and fix Wordsworth's meaning. It is by virtue of this transcendent, godlike, equalizing power of "feeling," that the poet attains to creative imagination, that highest potentiality of achievement which all men recognize in him, but for which inferior people are apt to mistake the sensationalism and grandiosity of writers who lash their dull minds into activity which they miscall feeling, and their language into diction which they miscall poetic, by stimulants in the shape of "great events," distinguished personages, and sentiments in full dress.

(2) Wordsworth defines poetry; or, rather, he discourses on the

mission and methods of true poetry. He always considers the poet, in spite of the feeling which he claims for him, as a philosophic *thinker*, who recollects, reflects, and selects, and who, though his work may indeed be described as a spontaneous overflow of feeling, and though his immediate aim is to give pleasure, is always more or less directly conscious of aiming at *truth*. In this Wordsworth feels no permanent antithesis: Truth, he holds, *is* Beauty (the source of pleasure); the poet *is* the philosopher. Similarly, the common is the nearer manifestation of the Divine; tranquillity is the purest source of emotion. In his most appreciative gush, the poet is much of an egoist; when he is most an egoist, he is most truly worshipping his Creator.

Poetry takes its origin, Wordsworth held, from emotion recollected in tranquillity. The poet is he who deliberately calls up in tranquillity impassioned ideas and situations, and who can find no better language to express the result than the ordinary speech of men. In doing this with pleasure and for pleasure, the poet does nothing beneath the dignity of a high mission. For "the native and naked dignity of man" is in no ascetic antithesis to pleasure, but is in fact one with it. The pleasure which the poet has and gives is philosophic as well as poetic; it arises from his contemplation, his reflective contemplation, of the Universe. Nothing in the Universe is alien from him; not even the *minutiæ* of science; "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of *all knowledge*."

But as to the poet, let Wordsworth speak for himself: "Let me ask, what is meant by the word 'Poet'? What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? and what language is to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to men; a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they

were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves: whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement."

Where, in this conception, is the place for metre and rhyme, the formal *differentiæ* of poetry? Wordsworth's defence, so to call it, of metre and rhyme is subtle and interesting. If the poet is to feel, think, and write only as a specially intense ordinary person, and to express himself in language which is essentially identical with the language of prose, why should he hamper or artificialize himself by what makes his expression *specifically* different from that of prose?

Wordsworth gives three reasons. First, the somewhat surprising one that verse is a restraint on the vagaries and possible excesses of passion. This sounds paradoxical; for we are accustomed to think of verse as the specifically appropriate medium of impassioned feeling, and as chosen for the very reason that it is free from the fetters of prose. But, says Wordsworth, passionate feeling and the excitement which is inseparable from the design of poetry are kept within bounds by the regularity of metre. And this is not all. Metre not only gives regularity to language, but "divests language, in a certain degree, of its reality," and throws "a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition." This touch of unreal glamour given by verse enables us to bear, *e.g.*, pathos, which would be intolerable in the hard everyday truthfulness of prose. "This opinion," Wordsworth holds, "may be illustrated by appealing to the reader's own experience of the reluctance with which he comes to the re-perusal of the distressful parts of *Clarissa Harlowe* or the *Gamester;* while Shakespeare's writings, in the most pathetic scenes, never act upon us, as pathetic, beyond the bounds of pleasure—an effect which, in a much greater degree than might be imagined, is to

be ascribed to small, but continual and regular impulses of pleasurable surprise from the metrical arrangement." Surely this distinction between the "pain" with which we shut *Clarissa*, and the "pleasure" with which we see the curtain fall on *Lear* or *Othello* is, to say the least of it, disputable; but the important point is to realize how much stress is laid by the austere Wordsworth on pleasure as the end of poetry; and this association between metre and pleasure is to be regarded as the second line of his defence.

The third line of defence is equally subtle, and Wordsworth does little more than hint at it. Metre and rhyme are of value, he says, because one element of the "pleasure" given by poetry is the sense of unity in diversity which is conveyed by the verse-form. Wordsworth, in fact, seems to regard the world of emotion and passion which confronts the poet as so imperfectly cosmic that he must impose upon it the forms of his own mind—forms expressed in the "regularities" of verse, if he is to "enjoy" it, as a poet may and should.

In all this Wordsworth seems to be feeling after a theory of imagination such as he expounded in the preface and essay of 1815. That theory we may briefly notice here, before parting with Wordsworth the critic.

Imagination is one of the hardest words in the language; but all literary and artistic critics seem to understand by it that intellectual faculty by which for artistic purposes the *data* of perception and recollection are arbitrarily modified or changed by the percipient or recollecting individual. It is the *individuality* as well as the artistic end of the faculty, which distinguishes imagination from mere knowledge, as Kant thought of knowledge; and it is the arbitrariness of its method which makes men speak of imagination as *creative*.

As creative, and therefore Divine, Wordsworth constantly spoke of imagination in his poetry. In his Preface of 1815, he grapples the matter in prose. Imagination, with which he conjoins "fancy," is one of the poet's faculties—the faculty which "modifies," "creates," and "associates"; and it is distinguished from "invention," which "composes" characters out of the *data* of observation and introspection. The modifying energy of imagination (which he elsewhere calls an "endowing" power) is governed "by fixed laws"; but Wordsworth does not

tell us what they are. He prefers to give instances of the energy. When Shakespeare speaks of the samphire-gatherer "hanging" on the cliff, or when Milton speaks of a far-off fleet seen "hanging" in the clouds, or again, when Wordsworth himself speaks of the stock-dove "brooding" over his own voice, or suggests that the cuckoo is a voice rather than a bird, the poet in each case is exercising imagination as a modifying power. A plain man would say that all these were instances simply of happy or beautiful metaphor. And again, in the noble images which expound the leech-gatherer's figure in *Resolution and Independence*:—

> "As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
> Couched on the bald top of an eminence,
> . . . . . .
> Like a sea-beast crawled forth, which on a shelf
> Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun himself,
> Such seemed this man;
> . . . . . .
> Motionless as a cloud the old man stood,
> That heareth not the loud winds when they call;"

the plain man is content to find a series of admirable similes. But Wordsworth explains that "in these images, the conferring, the abstracting, and the modifying powers of the Imagination, immediately and mediately acting, are all brought into conjunction." The Imagination takes life from the sea-beast and gives it to the stone; while the leech-gatherer himself is half-killed so as to make him seem almost as dead as the stone.

Imagination, says Wordsworth, *creates* in innumerable ways; chiefly, perhaps, by "consolidating numbers into unity, and dissolving and separating unity into number." Thus in Milton's lines about the Messiah—

> "Attended by ten thousand thousand Saints
> He onward came: far off his coming shone,"

Wordsworth finds that the retinue of saints, and the Person of the Messiah Himself, are lost almost and merged in the splendour of that indefinite abstraction, "His coming!" Here the critic is perhaps not quite so convincing as when he quotes without analysis from *King Lear* the two lines—

> "I tax not you, ye Elements, with unkindness,
> I never gave you kingdoms, call'd you daughters!"

as an instance of "human and dramatic Imagination." And indeed, in his whole treatment of imagination Wordsworth is disappointing; he undertakes more than he carries out; his analysis breaks down and falls short. By the idea of "Fancy" he seems less overcome; though he is perhaps less lucid in his account of it. He compares and contrasts it with imagination; and the substance of his meaning apparently is that fancy, unlike imagination, cannot *change*, except by slight superficial modification, the *data* given to her; their substance, so to call it, remains unalterable by so slight and tricksy a power; yet she can move her *data* about like puppets, and can play upon them with capricious and surprising lights which have an effect that may be almost creative. Moreover, fancy "ambitiously aims at a rivalship with imagination, and imagination stoops to work with the materials of fancy." Such proceedings and interchanges, the plain man feels, are too complicated, are at once too definitely and indefinitely conceived, to help the critic or reader very far along his way.

Wordsworth's best friends and most sympathetic expounders found much to object to in his theories. Coleridge, who loved psychological jargon, fell foul of both the "poetic diction" and the fancy-and-imagination doctrines. So did Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt from different points of view; while De Quincey had no difficulty in showing that Wordsworth's attitude towards the "diction" of verse was too polemical to be quite sound.

2. The other capital interest of Wordsworth in the Grasmere days was the condition of English and European politics. We remember how in his youth his whole nature was played upon like a musical instrument by the French Revolution, and how he was thrown into moral paralysis and practical altruism by his country's active hostility to France in 1793. Sir John Seeley has pointed out that we make a mistake when we regard the brief Peace of Amiens in 1802–3 as a mere interruption in a single and homogeneous war. He has reminded us that between 1793 and 1815 England and Europe were in arms against two quite different revolutions: first, the French Revolution; and, secondly, the Napoleonic Revolution. Roughly speaking, the French Revolution was attacked between 1793 and 1802; and the Napoleonic between 1803 and 1815. If, in one sense, Napoleon was the product of the French Revolution,

in another sense he was its enemy and destroyer; and it was thus quite logically justifiable to wish well to the French Revolution and afterwards to breathe out threatenings and slaughter against Napoleon. This, at all events, was what demonstrably happened in Wordsworth's case. There was a very real sense in which his sympathy with France, struggling against aristocratic and clerical abuses, was one with his sympathy with Europe, struggling against Napoleon. In both struggles the battle-cry was *liberty;* and for liberty Wordsworth, between Trafalgar and Waterloo, lost some of his passion. Those who think of him as Browning's *Lost Leader,* who think of him as "breaking from the van and the freemen" "and sinking to the rear and the slaves," think of him—to say the least of it—inaccurately. He did something very different.

The anti-Napoleonic struggle itself was not homogeneous. It was partly a resistance of governments to a destroying and usurping government; partly a passionate assertion of national independence. It was national independence—or, as men since Wordsworth's day have taken to calling it, "nationality" —that asserted itself in those Spanish and German uprisings which, more than any diplomacies or coalitions, brought Napoleon at last to his knees. To Wordsworth Napoleon appeared chiefly as a robber of independence. He has vividly painted for us his horror and anger as the significance of the First Consul and French Emperor became clear to him—

> "When, finally to close
> And seal up all the gains of France, a Pope
> Was summoned in to crown an Emperor;"

and when indignation had to serve instead of hope. But his anti-Napoleonic passion was not fully kindled until the tyrant ravished Switzerland of her freedom. Thenceforward he was to Wordsworth a criminal rather than a conqueror.

A curiously vital link binds Wordsworth's politics with his poetry. At Dove Cottage one May afternoon in 1802, Dorothy read Milton's sonnets to her brother. He had long known them, but had never before realized their power, their "dignified simplicity and majestic harmony." He at once "took fire," and, before he slept that night, had written two or three sonnets. If they were not his first, they were the first that were more

than experiments. Of these, only one survives; but it is a memorable one. It was the turning-point of the struggle; the Treaty of Amiens had been two months signed; Bonaparte had been three years First Consul and was becoming a portent in men's minds. Wordsworth was beginning to speculate about him, beginning to fear him; but he had not yet made up his mind about him. He dedicated to him his first tentative sonnet.

> "I grieved for Bonaparte, with a vain
> And an unthinking grief! The tenderest mood
> Of that Man's mind—what can it be? what food
> Fed his first hopes? What knowledge could *he* gain?
> 'Tis not in battles that from youth we train
> The Governor who must be wise and good,
> And temper with the sternness of the brain
> Thoughts motherly, and meek as womanhood.
> Wisdom doth live with children round her knees:
> Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk
> Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk
> Of the mind's business: these are the degrees
> By which true Sway doth mount; this is the stalk
> True Power doth grow on; and her rights are these."

Already, in this somewhat irregular piece, Wordsworth showed what he was to be as a sonneteer; here already are the massiveness, the unity, the seriousness, the sense of climax and finish,—above all, the pregnant suggestiveness of immortal phrase, which make the sonnet what at its best it is. But, notwithstanding the Miltonic fire which he felt burning within him, he can have had no prevision of the great place which his sonnets were to hold in the sum of his work. Nor can he have realized the significance of the coincidence which made Napoleon the theme of his first efforts. His appreciativeness of the sonnet and his sense of its fitness to some, at least, of his poetic moods, are expressed in the two sonnets *on* the sonnet which are too familiar for quotation; that which speaks of the form's narrow bounds as indeed "no prison," and of himself as finding therein "brief solace" under "the weight of too much liberty;" and that other, composed much later, in a walk by Rydal lake, in which Wordsworth defends the sonnet on the ground of its glorious history—the sonnet of Petrarch, Tasso, Camoens, Dante; of Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton. He was to use it,

exquisitely and nobly, for various purposes; for delicate landscape-painting and for intimate lyrical out-breathings; but chiefly for poetry of historical sense and social, ecclesiastical, and political conviction; above all, for the passion of liberty and national independence. Therefore it was not "idle" that his first sonnets were about Napoleon.

It was the Peace of Amiens that made it possible for the Wordsworths to cross to Calais in the summer of 1802, before William's marriage. The poet's mind was full of international politics and aglow with patriotism; and he used his newly discovered sonnet-medium freely. Looking westward at the setting Venus over England, he sounds greatly the note of patriotism, daring to take the glorious star for type of his country's glory—

> "Fair star of evening, splendour of the west,
> Star of my Country! on the horizon's brink
> Thou hangest, stooping, as might seem, to sink
> On England's bosom; yet well pleased to rest,
> Meanwhile, and be to her a glorious crest
> Conspicuous to the Nations. Thou, I think,
> Should'st be my Country's emblem; and should'st wink,
> Bright star! with laughter on her banners, dress'd
> In thy fresh beauty. There! that dusky spot
> Beneath thee, that is England; there she lies.
> Blessings be on you both! one hope, one lot,
> One life, one glory!—I, with many a fear
> For my dear Country, many heartfelt sighs,
> Among men who do not love her, linger here."

It was the first time he had been in France since 1792; and in the ten years the changes there had been greater than any changes in his own mind or sympathies. He despised the servility of the fickle French towards the First Consul. *What hardship had it been to wait an hour?* he puts it to them; having destroyed monarchy by so terrible a stroke, could they not have given "equality" a longer trial, so that if there was to be monarchy again, it should at least be monarchy rooting deeply in well-tried affections? About Calais the people seemed indifferent to the mushroom-monarch.

> "I have bent my way
> To the sea-coast, noting that each man frames
> His business as he likes,"

though it was the First Consul's birthday, and France was holding high festival. The memories of the Revolution in which the young poet so passionately believed, had dwindled to mocking echoes. He remembered how, in 1790, he had heard and seen the hailing of Liberty near Calais—

> "From hour to hour the antiquated Earth
> Beat like the heart of Man : songs, garlands, mirth,
> Banners, and happy faces, far and nigh ! "

Now, in 1802—

> "Sole register that these things were,
> Two solitary greetings have I heard,
> *Good-morrow, Citizen !* a hollow word,
> As if a dead man spake it ! "

The Corsican was the slayer of liberty everywhere. Four years previously he had seized the proud Republic of Venice as a conqueror, and had handed her over to Austria. Wordsworth sang her dirge in the great sonnet which commemorated her as "the eldest child of Liberty." And now Bonaparte was showing himself the abettor of slavery in its vulgarest form—the buying and selling of the African negro. The heroic "Toussaint l'Ouverture" had cleared the horror out of Hayti, and won San Domingo for libertarian France. At the Peace of Amiens Napoleon re-imposed slavery on San Domingo, and Toussaint, resisting the edict, was seized and thrown into a French dungeon even after he had at last yielded. Wordsworth, not knowing the place of his fate, but only that the tyrant's foot was on his neck, bids him to "wear a cheerful brow" in his chains, and to live in the greatness of his soul.

> "Thou hast left behind
> Powers that will work for thee : air, earth, and skies ;
> There's not a breathing of the common wind
> That will forget thee ; thou hast great allies ;
> Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
> And love, and man's unconquerable mind."

More and more clearly his own country stood out in the poet's imagination as the symbol and exemplar of the liberty which was passing away from France and the Continent. And it was a liberty of genuine morality ; the freedom of the self-possessed and self-possessing *soul*. But was the soul sound? When Wordsworth re-crossed the Channel and contrasted the

"vanity and parade" of London and other English towns with the look of quiet and desolation in France, he trembled even for England. Was not the canker of plutocracy already eating at her heart?

> "The wealthiest man among us is the best.
> Plain living and high thinking are no more."

It was now, in this moment of deep indignation and anxious fear, that he wrote sonnets—three of which are perhaps the greatest even he ever wrote—sonnets of commemoration and challenge, not without echo surely in the thunders of Trafalgar and Waterloo, which are too great to be omitted or curtailed in any book that would show Wordsworth as he was.

> "Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:
> England hath need of thee: she is a fen
> Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
> Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
> Have forfeited their ancient English dower
> Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
> Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
> And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
> Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
> Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
> Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
> So didst thou travel on life's common way,
> In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
> The lowliest duties on herself did lay."

> "It is not to be thought of that the Flood
> Of British freedom, which, to the open sea
> Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity
> Hath flowed, 'with pomp of waters, unwithstood,
> Roused though it be full often to a mood
> Which spurns the check of salutary bands,
> That this most famous Stream in bogs and sands
> Should perish; and to evil and to good
> Be lost for ever. In our halls is hung
> Armoury of the invincible Knights of old:
> We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
> That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold
> Which Milton held.—In every thing we are sprung
> Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold."

> "When I have borne in memory what has tamed
> Great Nations, how ennobling thoughts depart
> When men change swords for ledgers, and desert

The student's bower for gold, some fears unnamed
I had, my Country !—am I to be blamed ?
Now, when I think of thee, and what thou art,
Verily, in the bottom of my heart,
Of those unfilial fears I am ashamed.
For dearly must we prize thee ; we who find
In thee a bulwark for the cause of men ;
And I by my affection was beguiled :
What wonder if a Poet now and then,
Among the many movements of his mind,
Felt for thee as a lover or a child ! "

It is easy to understand how Wordsworth greeted the Spanish national uprising in which at last the *soul* of Europe began to revive, and how he hailed England's intervention in the Peninsula. The great year was 1808 ; Wordsworth moved from the too narrow bounds of Dove Cottage into the more spacious Allan Bank in June ; and there, in his inland dale he stood, eagerly watching the sunrise of liberty. The newspaper was brought from Keswick : the poet would often go to meet it at the top of the Raise at two in the morning. In August Vimeiro was fought ; but, as the autumn deepened, the prospect grew clouded. Wordsworth felt that the ministries of Nature about him in Westmorland made his political insight clear.

" Not 'mid the world's vain objects that enslave
The free-born Soul—that World whose vaunted skill
In selfish interest perverts the will,
Whose factions lead astray the wise and brave—
Not there ; but in dark wood and rocky cave,
And hollow vale which foaming torrents fill
With omnipresent murmur as they rave
Down their steep beds, that never shall be still :
Here, mighty Nature ! in this school sublime
I weigh the hopes and fears of suffering Spain ;
For her consult the auguries of time,
And through the human heart explore my way ;
And look and listen—gathering, whence I may,
Triumph, and thoughts no bondage can restrain."

As he listened to the raving of the autumnal wind, the poet, like Shelley afterwards, heard in it not only a dirge, but a promise and a prophecy, telling of "bright calms" that should succeed.

He wrote not sonnets only that autumn and winter at Allan

Bank. The splendid beginning of British intervention in the Peninsula, marked by the battle of Vimeiro, was spoiled by the so-called Convention of Cintra, by which the French were conducted scathless out of Portugal at British expense. The English nation was astonished and indignant at such apparent pusillanimity, and a court of inquiry was held. Wordsworth, as he wrote to Southey, was filled with detestation and abhorrence of the Convention. The authors of it showed their failure to understand the essential novelty of the situation—namely, the substitution of *national* for merely governmental opposition to Napoleon. Napoleon himself, naturally enough, "had committed a capital blunder in supposing that when he had intimidated the Sovereigns of Europe he had conquered the several nations." But it was disgraceful that a "child of Liberty" like England should make the same mistake. "As far as those men [the authors of the Convention of Cintra] could, they put an extinguisher upon the star which was then rising."

In these winter months Wordsworth relieved his mind by writing a pamphlet, which was published in the spring of 1809. It had one of the interminable titles beloved of serious and solid persons in those days, which in this case is worth citing, because it summarizes the substance of the essay. "Concerning the relations of Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal, to each other, and to the common enemy at this crisis, and specifically as affected by the Convention of Cintra; the whole brought to the test of those principles by which alone the independence and freedom of nations can be preserved or recovered."

"*The independence and freedom of nations:*" the essay glows with this theme like a fire fed with rich fuel. Wordsworth knew that he must seem inconsistent: in 1793 he had been shaken and soured by the hostility of England to France; why was he now so eager to push hostility to France beyond the limits of humanity and worldly policy? Because, he answered, in the second war the persons were changed, but the struggle, the enemy, were the same in both conflicts. The struggle was for liberty; the enemy was "the spirit of selfish tyranny and lawless ambition." Napoleon was not really France; the French government, even the French army, was not the French people. Napoleon's power, though parading

as that of the nation, was as evil a thing, wherever it established itself, as any monarchical or aristocratic abuse of the *ancien régime*.

Wordsworth's horror at the Convention of Cintra was thus not only consistent, but homogeneous, with his horror at the war which began in 1793; and his nature was as passionately stirred in the one case as in the other. Only in his anti-Napoleonic crusade he was full of wholesome hope, and felt himself supported by the best sentiment of his fellow-citizens. He was, as he expressed it, drawing out "to open day the truth from its recesses" in their minds. He was standing for "moral" against "mechanic" power; for soul against body; for "the purest hopes" against "purblind calculation"; for the "mighty engines of Nature" against the "base and puny tools and implements of policy." And seldom has a finer hymn of nationality been sung than in these prose sentences: "There is no middle course: two masters cannot be served! Justice must either be enthroned above might, and the moral law take place of the edicts of selfish passion; or the heart of the people, which alone can sustain the efforts of the people, will languish; their desires will not spread beyond the plough and the loom, the field and the fireside; the sword will appear to them an emblem of no promise; an instrument of no hope; an object of indifference, or disgust, or fear. Was there ever—since the earliest actions of men which have been transmitted by affectionate tradition, or recorded by faithful history, or sung to the impassioned harp of poetry—was there ever a people who presented themselves to the reason and the imagination, as under more holy influences than the dwellers upon the Southern Peninsula; as roused more instantaneously from a deadly sleep to a more hopeful wakefulness; as a mass fluctuates with one motion under the breath of a mightier wind; as breaking themselves up, and settling into several bodies, in more harmonious order; as reunited and embattled under a standard which was reared to the sun with more authentic assurance of final victory? Let the fire, which is never wholly to be extinguished, break out afresh; let but the human creature be roused; whether he have lain heedless and torpid in religious or civil slavery—have languished under a thraldom, domestic or foreign, or under both these alternately—or have drifted about

a helpless member of a class of disjointed and feeble barbarians —let him rise and act; and his domineering imagination, by which from childhood he has been betrayed, and the debasing affections which it has imposed upon him, will from that moment participate the dignity of the newly ennobled being whom they will now acknowledge for their master. . . . Still more inevitable and momentous are the results, when the individual knows that the fire . . . is not less living in the breasts of his associates; and sees the signs and testimonies of his own power, incorporated with those of a growing multitude, and not to be distinguished from them, accompany him wherever he moves. . . . If the object contended for be worthy and truly great . . . if cruelties have been committed upon an ancient and venerable people, which 'shake the human frame with horror'; if not alone the life which is sustained by the bread of the mouth, but that—without which there is no life—the life in the soul, has been directly and mortally warred against . . . then does intense passion, consecrated by a sudden revelation of justice, give birth to those higher and better wonders which I have described; and exhibit true miracles to the eyes of men, and the noblest which can be seen." Before the poet's imagination hung the vision of the Spanish Power in two hemispheres, poised, in an awful instant of destiny, and with one hope of salvation, between an effete monarchy and a new tyranny. England to the rescue, could but England be true to herself! "Reflect upon what was the temper and condition of the Southern Peninsula of Europe—the noble temper of the people of this mighty island, sovereigns of the all-embracing ocean; think also of the condition of so vast a region in the Western continent and its islands; and we shall have cause to fear that ages may pass away before a conjunction of things, so marvellously adapted to ensure prosperity to virtue, shall present itself again. It could scarcely be spoken of as being to the wishes of men—it was so far beyond their hopes. The government which had been exercised under the name of the old Monarchy of Spain—this government, imbecile even to dotage, whose very selfishness was destitute of vigour, had been removed; taken laboriously and foolishly by the plotting Corsican to his own bosom; in order that the world might see . . . to what degree a man of bad principles is despicable—though of great power—

working blindly against his own purposes." The opportunity for beneficent intervention was made as much by the stupidity as by the genius of the tyranny. "It was a high satisfaction to behold demonstrated . . . to what a narrow domain of knowledge the intellect of a Tyrant must be confined; that, if the gate by which wisdom enters has never been opened, that of policy will surely find moments when it will shut itself against its pretended master imperiously and obstinately. To the eyes of the very peasant in the field, this sublime truth was laid open—not only that a Tyrant's domain of knowledge is narrow, but melancholy as narrow; inasmuch as—from all that is lovely, dignified, or exhilarating in the prospect of human nature—he is inexorably cut off; and therefore he is inwardly helpless and forlorn."

In all this there is surely no "reaction"; there is nothing which the most modern "Liberalism" need disavow. Two years after the Convention of Cintra, while Wellington was plodding on through the Peninsular campaigns, with the issue doubtful and opposition keen, an eminent "Jingo" of his day, Sir Charles Pasley, of the Royal Engineers, wrote a pamphlet on *Military Policy and Institutions of the British Empire*, which moved Wordsworth to a rejoinder. Pasley maintained that Britain, if she was to overthrow Napoleon, ought to follow his example by winning a basis of power on the Continent. Against this view Wordsworth raised again his standard of national independence, of popular self-government. He rested his hopes, he wrote to Pasley, "with respect to the emancipation of Europe, upon moral influence, and the wishes and opinions of the respective nations." "You treat," he went on, "of *conquest* as if *conquest* could in itself, nakedly and abstractedly considered, confer rights. If we once admit this proposition, all morality is driven out of the world. . . . I think there is nothing more unfortunate for Europe than the condition of Germany and Italy in these respects [their divided state]. Could the barriers be dissolved which have divided the one nation into Neapolitans, Tuscans, Venetians, etc., and the other into Prussians, Hanoverians, etc., and could they once be taught to feel their strength, the French would be driven back into their own land immediately. I wish to see Spain, Italy, France, Germany formed into independent nations. . . . England requires

as you have shown so eloquently and ably, a new system of martial policy ; but England, as well as the rest of Europe, requires what is more difficult to give it,—a new course of education, a higher tone of moral feeling, more of the grandeur of the imaginative faculties, and less of the petty processes that would manage the concerns of nations in the same calculating spirit with which it would set about building a house."

Two sonnets, both written in 1811, may fix for us more permanently than any prose extracts the key of Wordsworth's politics in this, their anti-Napoleonic strain.

"The power of Armies is a visible thing,
Formal, and circumscribed in time and space ;
But who the limits of that power shall trace
Which a brave People into light can bring
Or hide, at will,—for freedom combating
By just revenge inflamed? No foot may chase,
No eye can follow, to a fatal place
That power, that spirit, whether on the wing
Like the strong wind, or sleeping like the wind
Within its awful caves.—From year to year
Springs this indigenous produce far and near ;
No craft this subtle element can bind,
Rising like water from the soil, to find
In every nook a lip that it may cheer."

"Here pause : the poet claims at least this praise,
That virtuous Liberty hath been the scope
Of his pure song, which did not shrink from hope
In the worst moment of these evil days ;
From hope, the paramount *duty* that Heaven lays,
For its own honour, on man's suffering heart.
Never may from our souls one truth depart—
That an accursed thing it is to gaze
On prosperous tyrants with a dazzled eye ;
Nor—touched with due abhorrence of *their* guilt
For whose dire ends tears flow, and blood is spilt,
And justice labours in extremity—
Forget thy weakness, upon which is built,
O wretched man, the throne of tyranny !"

If political reaction came, if Wordsworth ever became in any sense a "lost leader," it was in a later chapter of his life.

CHAPTER IX

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

WORDSWORTH'S tract on the Convention of Cintra was revised and prepared for the press by a young man of letters whom he had not known very long, but whose gifts he already rated very highly. Thomas de Quincey is, and must always remain, one of the most vivid and remarkable of all the members of Wordsworth's circle, though it seems doubtful where he may ultimately stand among English prose classics. As to his early discipleship of Wordsworth, at all events, and his competence to understand him and to mediate between him and intellectual England, there can be no doubt. De Quincey, a strange, delicate, wayward, clever, well-read boy, with precocious skill in Greek, came across *Lyrical Ballads* in 1799, at Bath. Two years later, when he was sixteen, he read *Ruth* in a London newspaper, into which it had been copied; and these first tastings of the new poetry were an intoxication. In 1803 he went up to Worcester College, Oxford, at the ordinary age of eighteen, and had already received a precious letter from Wordsworth, a letter of kindly sympathy in reply to the enthusiastic and irrepressible outpourings of an admiring reader. During the extraordinary years before De Quincey's matriculation, the three years at Manchester Grammar School, ending with the picturesque flight in the sunlit silence of an early July morning so well known to all readers of the *Opium-Eater;* the wanderings in Wales; the squalid months in rat-haunted London rooms, and among the perils of nocturnal Oxford Street; mixing strangely with the earliest pleasures of opium, there was burning and growing in the boy's nature a pure intellectual passion, a "nympholepsy," as he called it, in his pedantic way, of which Wordsworth — Wordsworth idealized among his

mountains—was the source and the object. In his first long walk from Manchester to Chester, the runaway was full of *Ruth.* With "an elaborate and pompous sunset" in front of him hanging over the mountains of North Wales, he thought of the American lake described to Ruth by her lover—

> "With all its fairy crowds
> Of islands that together lie
> As quietly as spots of sky
> Among the evening clouds."

At that moment, as he somewhat theatrically puts it, he alone "in all Europe" was quoting from Wordsworth. That might be rather difficult to prove, but, at least, it seems certain that he alone, or all but alone—for was not "Christopher North," albeit somewhat doubtingly, with him?—among Wordsworthian readers and critics was intellectually in love with Wordsworth, smitten and subdued and modified by the mere charm of his verse. The poet was to him a hero to be looked at, a god to be sought and worshipped. Among the kindnesses in Wordsworth's first letters was a frank invitation to visit him at Grasmere, and the boy was at once eager and afraid to go. Before he had written to Wordsworth, when he was planning his escape from Manchester, he had thought of making for the Lakes, drawn thither by "a secret fascination, subtle, sweet, fantastic, and spiritually strong." As a Manchester child, he had always been near them, and his imagination had been introduced to them by Mrs. Radcliffe. Then came the Wordsworthian *engouement.* But that very *engouement* restrained as much as it impelled the impecunious fugitive from school. "The very depth of the impressions which had been made upon me, either as regarded the poetry or the scenery, was too solemn and (unaffectedly I may say it) too spiritual, to clothe itself in any hasty or chance movement as at all adequately expressing its strength, or reflecting its hallowed character. If you, reader, were a devout Mahometan, throwing gazes of mystical awe daily towards Mecca, or were a Christian devotee looking with the same rapt adoration to St. Peter's at Rome, or to El Kodah —the Holy City of Jerusalem—(so called even amongst the Arabs, who hate both Christian and Jew), how painfully would it jar upon your sensibilities, if some friend, sweeping past you upon a high road, with a train (according to the circumstances)

of dromedaries or of wheel carriages, should suddenly pull up, and say, 'Come, old fellow, jump up alongside of me, I'm off for the Red Sea, and here's a spare dromedary;' or 'off for Rome, and here's a well-cushioned barouche;' seasonable and convenient it might happen that the invitation were; but still it would shock you that a journey which, with or without your consent, could not *but* assume the character eventually of a saintly pilgrimage, should arise and take its initial movement upon a casual summons, or upon a vulgar opening of momentary convenience." If he could ever dare to present himself to Wordsworth, it must be in circumstances very different from those in which he was running away from school, without money, and in disgrace. His first crop of wild oats once sown, however, once a member of the University of Oxford and Commoner of Worcester, De Quincey was respectable enough to bethink himself of entering any presence. Nor did his interest in the Romantic Revival, and his passionate feeling for Wordsworth and the Lakes diminish while he was at Oxford. On the contrary, his desultory studies there were largely in English literature; and, such was his critical discernment, that English literature meant for him not only Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, but, beyond all cavil or question, Wordsworth and Coleridge also. And as for the Wordsworthian *engouement*, there was no sign of its diminishing. "Extinguished such a passion could not be. . . . The very names of the ancient hills —Fairfield, Seat Sandal, Helvellyn, Blencathara, Glaramara; the names of the sequestered glens—such as Borrowdale, Martindale, Mardale, Wastdale, and Ennerdale; but, above all, the shy pastoral recesses . . . Grasmere, for instance, the lonely abode of the poet himself, solitary, and yet sowed, as it were, with a thin diffusion of humble dwellings—here a scattering, and there a clustering, as in the starry heavens . . . these were so many local spells upon me, equally poetic and elevating with the Miltonic names of Valdarno and Vallombrosa." And under these spells, strengthening rather than weakening, that most unusual of undergraduates walked about the Oxford streets and the Worcester college gardens.

In the course of vacation-rambles, De Quincey twice got as near Grasmere as Coniston; but as yet he got no further. "Once I absolutely went forwards from Coniston to the very

gorge of Hammerscar, from which the whole Vale of Grasmere suddenly breaks upon the view . . . with its lovely valley stretching before the eye in the distance, the lake lying immediately below, with its solemn ark-like island . . . seemingly floating on its surface. . . . In one quarter, a little wood . . . more directly in opposition to the spectator, a few green fields ; and beyond them, just two bowshots from the water, a little white cottage gleaming from the midst of trees, with a vast and seemingly never-ending series of ascents, rising above it to the height of more than three thousand feet. That little cottage was Wordsworth's. . . . Catching one hasty glimpse of this loveliest of landscapes, I retreated like a guilty thing, for fear I might be surprised by Wordsworth, and then returned, faint-heartedly, to Coniston, and so to Oxford, *re infectâ*."

De Quincey crowned his academic queerness by absconding in the middle of the examination for his degree. That may have been in 1807, though there is no certainty about the matter. Certain it is, however, that in 1807 he first saw Wordsworth. Earlier in the same year he first saw Coleridge, and it was through Coleridge that he came eye to eye with Coleridge's great collaborator in *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge, indeed, shared the hero-worship he bestowed on Wordsworth, not only because of his poetry, but also because of his addiction to German philosophy, one of De Quincey's miscellaneous pursuits. Coleridge, De Quincey seems to have been readier to face than Wordsworth ; and he was much disappointed that he was away in Malta from April, 1804, to August, 1806. He even had thoughts of going to Malta to gratify his longing, but he decided to wait. In 1807 Coleridge was in the west country. From Bristol to Bridgwater went De Quincey one summer day, bound for Tom Poole's at Nether Stowey. Poole he found, and was delighted with the "stout, plain-looking farmer," in his "rustic, old-fashioned house," with its splendid library ; but the incalculable S. T. C. was away on a visit. De Quincey stayed with Poole a day or two "until his [Coleridge's] motions should be ascertained"—always a difficult matter. For days they were unascertainable. Then De Quincey went over to Bridgwater to see whether he could find his prize ; and there, sure enough, under an archway in the main street, stood the man. "In height he might seem to be about five feet eight (he was, in

reality, about an inch and a half taller, but his figure was of an order which drowns the height); his person was broad and full, and tended even to corpulence; his complexion was fair, though not what painters technically style fair, because it was associated with black hair; his eyes were large and soft in their expression; and it was from the peculiar appearance of haze or dreaminess which mixed with their light that I recognized my object."

In the autumn, De Quincey met Coleridge at Bristol, heard from him that he was to be lecturing in London in the following winter, and offered to escort his wife and family to Keswick to their winter quarters at Greta Hall. The fateful moment had arrived. The escort was accepted; and in October the party—Mrs. Coleridge, Hartley, aged nine, Derwent, two years younger, and Sara, two years younger still—set out with De Quincey, aged twenty-two, in a post-chaise, the horses' heads turned towards the North.

North, with the minimum of deflection, the travellers went, by Gloucester, Bridgnorth, Liverpool, Lancaster, until, one afternoon about three, they found themselves changing horses for the last time at quiet Ambleside, at the gate of Paradise. There, in the still bright afternoon, along the road we know, across Pelter Bridge, along Rydal mere, and over "White-moss," with the view into Grasmere, before the final dip to the lake and Wordsworth's door. De Quincey and the two boys walk up the hill, of course; and from the top they are minded to go down at a run, leaving the chaise to grind over the rough road at its own pace.

"O moment, one and infinite!"

What is this cottage with the white walls, and the yew-trees in front, that at a turn of the road arrests suddenly the scamperers downhill? Is it not the same that De Quincey fled from, "like a guilty thing surprised," the year before at Hammerscar? Heavens! it is; for Hartley turns in at the gate. De Quincey tastes the fearful joys of hero-worship on the very edge of beatific vision. This time he will stand it out; he will not run away. In his transport he forgets his manners; he does not wait for the arrival of the chaise, that he may hand out Mrs. Coleridge; he hurries in after Hartley, and has the reward of his long patience.

All this is described by De Quincey with some artificiality of manner; but his emotion, as every hero-worshipper knows, was perfectly natural, perfectly credible, and quite ordinary. What is not ordinary, what makes the moment remarkable, is the electricity that passed in that first handshake of Wordsworth and De Quincey, the instant of physical contact between a great poet, much misunderstood, greatly unpopular, serenely, coldly self-centred; and a critic, hardly great, but infinitely ingenious, and with much in his power; a critic, subtle, sensitive, sympathetic, doubtfully scrupulous; accepting the Romanticism of Coleridge and Wordsworth with all his heart, and yet ready, on the smallest provocation, to lacerate it here and there with his logical understanding, and in a fit of the spleen to expose his heroes with the resources of a master of style.

However, electricity is, for the most part, a secret agency; and the meeting was serene in itself and its immediate sequel. While the poet was receiving Mrs. Coleridge and Sara, De Quincey was making acquaintance, inside the cottage, first with Mrs. Wordsworth, and then with Dorothy. We already know his impression of the poet's wife. That of the "dear, dear sister," was equally vivid, and—from all the evidence we have—equally true. He saw the eyes, "not soft, nor fierce and bold, but wild and startling, and hurried in their motion." He saw the dark complexion, "gipsy" in its "determinate tan," as of one against whom the "misty mountain winds" are "free to blow." He felt the ardour and sensibility; he was conscious of "some subtle fire of impassioned intellect . . . which, being alternately pushed forward into a conspicuous expression by the irresistible instincts of her temperament, and then immediately checked, in obedience to the decorum of her sex and age and her maidenly condition, gave to her whole demeanour, and to her conversation, an air of embarrassment, and even of self-conflict, that was almost distressing to witness. . . . At times, the self-counteraction and self-baffling of her feelings caused her even to stammer, and so determinately to stammer, that a stranger who should have seen her and quitted her in that state of feeling, would have certainly set her down for one plagued with that infirmity of speech, as distressingly as Charles Lamb himself." He thought she walked with a too "glancing

quickness," and noticed that she stooped. Above everything, her wonderful intellectual sympathy struck him. You could tell her nothing, quote nothing to her, which she did not receive so as to give it a new interest for you. "The pulses of light are not more quick or more inevitable in their flow and undulation, than were the answering and echoing movements of her sympathizing attention." This we can well believe. And we can also believe that, though Dorothy had had more chances of going into polite society than Mary Hutchinson of Penrith, though she had even lived "under the protection" of a Canon of Windsor, she was not so "lady-like" as Mrs. Wordsworth.

But Wordsworth himself has by this time brought in Mrs. Coleridge, and they are standing, we may hope, by a good fire. What did De Quincey think of his hero in the flesh?

He thought, in the first place, that he was not well made. His legs, he thought, were faulty; his shoulders were narrow and had a "droop," and his "total effect" was always worst "in a state of motion." But his face was more satisfactory.

"Many such" [faces], writes De Quincey, "and finer, I have seen amongst the portraits of Titian, and, in a later period, amongst those of Vandyke, from the great era of Charles I., as also from the Court of Elizabeth and of Charles II., but none which has more impressed me in my own time." It was a long North-of-England face; the head was rounded behind as well as in front; the forehead was remarkable for its breadth rather than its height. The eyes were small and neither "bright," "lustrous," nor "piercing"; and yet at times, under the influence of physical fatigue, they would have a look "the most solemn and spiritual that it is possible for the human eye to wear." The nose, as all portraits show, was large and arched, indicating, De Quincey thinks, a strong animal basis of temperament. The mouth was not remarkable, but its "circumjacencies" were: there was a "swell and protrusion of the parts above and around" the lips, which reminded De Quincey of Milton's mouth, especially as it appears in the crayon drawing of Milton, engraved by Richardson, whose verisimilitude was eagerly attested by Milton's daughter. In other respects, De Quincey thought that Wordsworth's face was like Milton's; in the droop of the eyelids, and the lie of the hair on the brow.

De Quincey's Wordsworthian fruition, the seeing of his hero

face to face, produced, he tells us, a change "in the physical condition of his nervous system." This is a grand way of saying that, after he had seen and spoken to Wordsworth, he was no longer afraid of seeing and speaking to him. He regarded him henceforward as, like Milton's Raphael, an "affable angel, who conversed on the terms of man with man." The first evening passed pleasantly; the old-fashioned lamp-lit tea-table of a November evening was delightful; and then Wordsworth read from Fairfax's Tasso; and then "about eleven," De Quincey found himself in (presumably) the bedroom which the Wordsworths had built. It was a narrow squeeze at Dove Cottage when there were guests; and in the morning De Quincey discovered (he seems to have been too sleepy to discover it at night, or what kind of light did he go to bed by?) that a "cottage bed" in the room was occupied by Wordsworth's three years' old boy John, who woke him by repeating the creed as part of his matins. Dorothy made breakfast on that rainy morning; and then, in spite of the rain, the poet and his sister took De Quincey round the six-mile circuit of Rydal and Grasmere lakes. Mrs. Coleridge and her children pursued their journey to Keswick; and the next day, Mr. and Mrs. Wordsworth and Dorothy started with De Quincey on an expedition to see Southey, and the joint-establishment of Southeys and Coleridges at Greta Hall. They went by way of Ullswater, driving to Ambleside in a one-horse cart driven by "a bonnie young woman," Dorothy scattering genial salutations as they rumbled along. On they went, walking, of course, up the steep ascent of Kirkstone Pass; then, in the cart again, down upon Brothers' Water and Patterdale, at whose inn they stopped in the moonlight. There a change of horses; and on "through those most romantic woods and rocks of Stybarrow—through those silent glens of Glencoin and Glenridding—through . . . Gobarrow Park—we saw, alternately, for four miles, the most grotesque and the most awful spectacles—

'Abbey windows
With Moorish temples of the Hindoos,'

all fantastic, all as unreal and shadowy as the moonlight which created them; whilst, at every angle of the road, broad gleams came upwards of Ullswater, stretching for nine miles northward, but, fortunately for its effect, broken into three watery

chambers of almost equal length, and never all visible at once." At "Ewesmere" (probably Easemerehill close to Pooley Bridge) they spent the night, and there they left the ladies. Wordsworth and his guests walked on by Emont Bridge to Penrith; and on that day *tête-à-tête* companionship between the two probably began; for did not Wordsworth read part of his *White Doe of Rylstone*, hardly yet seriously begun, to the disciple?—an incident "most memorable" to the critic. De Quincey left Wordsworth behind at Penrith, and walked over the hills alone by Threlkeld to Keswick and Greta Hall, where Southey and Mrs. Coleridge received him. Thither came Wordsworth the following day; and De Quincey watched the two great men together, with eyes on the look-out, and ears listening for mischief. He thought they were not very friendly, or, at least, not more than friendly. In one respect, however, they seemed to him too friendly, namely, in their sentiments on public affairs. De Quincey was an orthodox Pittite; and he heard, with dismay, echoes of unmistakable "Jacobinism," as it seemed to him, in the sympathetic talk of Wordsworth and Southey. There was even profane jibing at the English royal family, and about the hopelessness of any good for England until they were expatriated, say to Botany Bay! What was a proper young Oxford Tory to think of the convenience of such jesting?

Next day, the two pedestrians returned to Dove Cottage, and the first chapter of De Quincey's personal acquaintance with Wordsworth was closed. He went south, first to Bristol, and then to London, seeing much of Coleridge, and, once, giving the poor laudanum-dazed, lecturing, ambulatory man very substantial pecuniary help.

In June, 1808, the Wordsworths made their flitting from the too strait bounds of Dove Cottage to Allan Bank. As the winter drew on, and Wordsworth settled down to the *Convention of Cintra*, the discomforts of a hastily-chosen new house pressed on the inhabitants. The chimneys smoked; the cellars were wet. One day the whole household had to go to bed because no fire would burn without intolerable smoke. If things could not be remedied, the Wordsworths would have to leave Grasmere, for there was no other house to be had. Fortunately, the final efforts of the workmen must have been rewarded with some success, for Allan Bank remained the Wordsworth's home until

1811. The first winter there was not dull, though it was uncomfortable. The discomfort, indeed, was heightened by the fact that they had guests during great part of the time. Coleridge was there, trying to launch *The Friend*, and preparing the first number. Coleridge was still very dear to the Wordsworths, dear and worrying and, for the most part, grievous. He was trying to do without opium, and his London lectures had not been a failure. Still, he was in wretched health, physical and moral, as, indeed, he nearly always was. He was frankly separated from his wife that winter; that is, he lived at Allan Bank, and she at Greta Hall, to their mutual satisfaction, and, as Dorothy Wordsworth hoped, their mutual benefit. "They are upon friendly terms," she wrote, "and occasionally see each other. In fact, Mrs. Coleridge was more than a week at Grasmere under the same roof with him." Things might have been worse, then; but it could not be said that they were ideal.

De Quincey, too, was a guest at Allan Bank that winter; but neither from him nor from the Wordsworths have any particulars of his visit come to us. He must, however, have known all about the first number of *The Friend;* and he certainly knew all about the *Convention of Cintra* pamphlet. In the spring of 1809 he went south again, to Bristol and London, to "eat dinners" and otherwise make some kind of overtures towards active life; and in London he saw Wordsworth's pamphlet through the press, enriching it with an appendix, and worrying the printers with his punctuation. Wordsworth thought De Quincey's additions "most masterly," and was very grateful to his Oxford disciple, in spite of his finicking ways with colons and semi-colons. All the foundations of a close friendship were being laid. While De Quincey was at Allan Bank, he was keeping his eye on Dove Cottage; and, before he left, it was settled that he was to be its next tenant,—Dorothy undertaking the oversight of furnishing and the rest of it, against his return in November. She enjoyed the work; and it is evident that the coming of the new occupant was much looked forward to in the Vale. Backwards and forwards Dorothy trudged between Allan Bank and the cottage in that spring and summer of 1809 (the great year, for England, of Darwin's birth and Tennyson's and Gladstone's; the year, also, in which Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* saw the

light); seeing to the laying of carpets, the hanging of curtains; above all, the setting-up of bookshelves for one of the most bookish of men; in that respect, how unlike her William! The Wordsworths were too near at Allan Bank to feel it any pain to go back to Dove Cottage; and Dorothy loved her visits in De Quincey's interest; hearing the cuckoo as of old, and fancying that the little birds in the orchard recognized her, and rejoiced in the branches of the apple-trees at her presence.

De Quincey's coming, she felt, would carry on the Wordsworthian tradition at the cottage. "Pleasant indeed it is to think of that little orchard, which for over seven years at least [such was the length of De Quincey's lease] will be a secure covert for the birds, and undisturbed by the woodman's axe." So Dorothy wrote. And she went on telling her "dear friend" of the "impious strife" waged that year by the said woodman's axe among the old trees on Nab Scar, and of "the wicked passions," uttering themselves in lawsuits and rumours of lawsuits, that were let loose in the very sanctuary of Nature.

De Quincey arrived, bag and baggage, in October, to stay with the Wordsworths and bear with them the still smoky chimneys of Allan Bank, while his servant prepared the cottage. More than a month he enjoyed this ever-ready hospitality—Dorothy writing that he seemed like one of the family. At last the cottage was ready, and he entered on his long residence there, his occupancy, with many long intervals, for twenty-seven years.

And De Quincey loved his cottage, well enough, at least, to live there a great deal, and to write about it in his most engaging style. For his sake, the reader will bear to hear a little more about it, so that when he goes to look at it he may remember that it has a complete double set of associations.

"Cottage immortal in my remembrance!" he apostrophized it once. "This was the scene of struggles the most tempestuous and bitter within my own mind: this the scene of my despondency and unhappiness: this the scene of my happiness—a happiness which justified the faith of man's *earthly* lot as upon the whole a dowry from heaven! It was, in its exterior, not so much a picturesque cottage . . . as it was lovely: one gable-end was, indeed, most gorgeously apparelled in ivy, and so far picturesque; but . . . the front . . . was embowered—nay, it may be

said, smothered—in roses of different species, amongst which the moss and the damask prevailed. These, together with as much jasmine and honeysuckle as could find room to flourish, . . . performed the acceptable service of breaking the unpleasant glare that would else have wounded the eye. . . . It was very irregular in its outline to the rear, by the aid of one little projecting room, and also of a stable and little barn in immediate contact with the dwelling-house."

Here, then, a mile from one of the poets of his dearest adoption, with his thirty chestfuls or so of books, and, alas! with a decanter full of laudanum on the table beside him, at all events, on Saturday nights, this singular young man of twenty-five, the "most well-informed man of his age" that Southey had ever met (and Southey's standard of information was high), settled down to read German philosophy, pedestrianize, and intoxicate himself with the alluring Eastern drug. He made a strange and dubious successor to the harmless, abstemious Wordsworths—abstemious almost as much from reading, in De Quincey's avid sense of the word, as from illegitimate stimulants and sedatives. Yet we must not reject the kind of romance with which the opium-eater invested Dove Cottage in his turn. When we have had enough of the sweet garden-life and Nature-worship of William and Dorothy, let us, years afterwards, enter Dove Cottage on some bleak winter night, and look on at another kind of pleasure. De Quincey has by this time taken a wife, a healthy, homely, Westmorland lass, Margaret Simpson by name, daughter of Farmer Simpson (a "statesman," as freeholder-farmers are called in those parts), who lived at Nab Cottage. He loves winter and darkness and artificial light, so we must not look for him in the orchard or the summer-house or by the well, or prone on daisy- or celandine-besprinkled grass. Winter, "in its sternest shape," was an essential of De Quincey's happiness, not for the sake of sunlight on snow-wreath, sparkle of icicle, or the pink flush of mild sunsets on the high clouds, but for the sake of "the divine pleasures" of a winter fireside. He enumerates them: "Candles at four o'clock, warm hearthrugs, tea, a fair tea-maker, shutters closed, curtains flowing in ample draperies on the floor, whilst the wind and rain are raging audibly without. . . . Start at the first week of November: thence to the end of

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

FROM THE PAINTING BY SIR J. WATSON GORDON IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

January, Christmas Eve being the meridian line, you may compute the period when happiness is in season, which, in my judgment, enters the room with the tea-tray." And the tea-tray is not mainly for Mrs. De Quincey's benefit, nor is it a piece of ceremonialism. There is an "eternal teapot" in the vision. "I [De Quincey] usually drink tea from eight o'clock at night to four in the morning." As we look in, then, we see these things; and we see that the room is "populous" with about five thousand books, steadily collected since De Quincey went to Oxford. We see a good fire and simple furniture, and a motherly and not intellectual wife making tea. Lastly, we see a decanter holding a quart of ruby-coloured laudanum on the table; beside it a book of German metaphysics; and, near the candles and the laudanum and the German metaphysics, we see the large head and pale, short-sighted face of De Quincey himself.

No other inhabitation did Dove Cottage know in the tens and twenties of the nineteenth century. Yet De Quincey was by no means always there; he went to London and ate dinners at the Middle Temple; he went to the west country; he went to Edinburgh and saw "Christopher North" about *Blackwood*. As a rule, he soon drifted back to Grasmere. In 1821 he was some months in London, and in that year the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* began to come out in the *London Magazine*. Yet, if it was (as it is credibly reported) in London, and "in a little room at the back of Mr. H. G. Bohn's premises, No. 4, York Street, Covent Garden," that De Quincey described the pleasures and pains of opium, it was at Dove Cottage that he felt them. The "pains of opium," those delirious horrors in that jasmine-clothed, rose-scented place of innocence and peace; what a paradox!

The year 1813 was critical in the lives of both De Quincey and Wordsworth. For Wordsworth it was the year in which he finally left Grasmere and settled at Rydal Mount. For De Quincey it was a year of multiform calamity. Something—probably something pecuniary—went seriously wrong in his affairs; illness, "a most appalling irritation of the stomach," seized him; he became "a regular and confirmed (no longer an intermitting) opium-eater." We may think of the year, perhaps, as the moment of transition from the pleasures to the pains. It

was unfortunate, no doubt, from this point of view, that the Wordsworths left the Vale, and went even to so short a distance as Rydal. For their going denuded Grasmere of the society which might have kept De Quincey on a higher moral plane. Coleridge had disappeared from those parts in 1810, to go to London, then to Bristol, and finally, to enter on his long domestication at Highgate; and the Lakes saw him no more. Southey was a long way off; and Southey did not care much for De Quincey. During their last years at Grasmere, De Quincey's relations to the Wordsworths were rather uncertain. With Wordsworth himself the friendship did not grow. There was no positive breach, but there was undeniable estrangement, which was emphasized by the departure of the poet from the Vale. Wordsworth was reserved; and, though he was in no discreditable sense self-involved, he lived too much in the practice of his art, too much in the routine of domesticity, and too much in the rites of Nature-worship, to set much store by companionship, however intellectually congenial. And was perfect intellectual congeniality possible between those two men? De Quincey had helped Wordsworth with his pamphlet; he understood his poetry, at least better than any other of the small band of Wordsworth-readers in those days; and, before he saw him, his heart had bounded like a lover's at the thought of him. But was that enough for a perfect friendship with such a man? Was not De Quincey too bookish, too merely ingenious and subtle, to claim perfect fellowship with one so absolutely original, so naked-souled as Wordsworth? And then their habits were so irreconcilable! There is no reason to suppose that De Quincey would hide, or would try or wish to hide, the laudanum-decanter from Wordsworth's austere eye; and what can Wordsworth have thought of that? And the tea-drinking till four in the morning! Those were not Wordsworth's ways. And the German metaphysics! We know what Wordsworth thought of them and of German literature in general when he was in Germany; and he was not a man to change his estimates under anybody's influence. Both men were great walkers, but even here they differed. For while Wordsworth would stroll out before an orthodox bedtime to see the moon and the stars, De Quincey was an out-and-out nocturnal animal; and, as he prowled along, he thought less of moon and stars than of signs

of humanity ; the twinklings in cottage windows ; the telling of the hours to heedless ears in graves. And, to crown all, there was De Quincey's incurable, appalling shyness ; his irrepressible impulse always to run away from everybody !

But if he drew off from Wordsworth himself, if the glamour of years inevitably waned, De Quincey was still closely knit with Dorothy. The Wordsworth children, too, twined themselves round his still bachelor heart, and the shy, pale-faced little man, with his comings and goings, was an object of great interest to the youngsters. A letter from him, when an absentee in London, would bring a flush of pleasure to Johnny's face ; and all the children looked eagerly for the promised gifts—the black hat, the toy carriage, or whatever they might be—on his return. Poor little Katy was his special friend. As an infant she noticed De Quincey more than anybody, except her mother. When she died, in 1812, he mourned her with a note of real poignancy. He was in London at the time of her death ; Dorothy wrote to tell him of it, and of "the perfect image of peace" on the bed. "I was truly glad to find," he wrote, in the course of his reply, "from your account of her funeral, that those who attended were, in general, such as would more or less unaffectedly partake in your sorrow. It has been an awful employment to me, the recollecting where I was and how occupied when this solemn scene was going on. At that time I must have been in the streets of London ; tired, I remember, for I had just recovered from sickness, but cheerful, and filled with pleasant thoughts. . . . As well as I recollect, I must have been closing my eyes in sleep just about the time that my blessed Kate was closing hers for ever ! Oh that I might have died for her or with her ! . . . If I had seen her in pain I could have done anything for her ; and reason it was that I should, for she was a blessing to *me*, and gave me many and many an hour of happy thoughts that I can never have again." His heart, he assures Dorothy, grows heavier every day. As he was packing his things to go back to Westmorland, he remembered how, on the Sunday before he left Grasmere, Katy got up on a chair, and putting her hand on his mouth, whispered earnestly, "Kinsey ! Kinsey ! what a bring Katy from London ?" Never, he thought, should he hear so sweet a voice again. The poor child, as we know, was to her father an incarnation of childhood,

and some of his sweetest poetry of childhood was dedicated to her. It was, in some respects, the same with De Quincey. He made prose-poetry about her; he fanned and stimulated his passionate feeling about her. "I had always viewed her," he wrote, "as an impersonation of the dawn and the spirit of infancy; and this abstraction seated in her person, together with the visionary sort of connection which even in her parting hours she assumed with the summer sun, by turning her immersion into the cloud of death with the rising and the setting of that fountain of life—these combined impressions recoiled so violently into a contrast or polar antithesis to the image of death, that each exalted and heightened the other." And so, when he came back to Grasmere, little Katy's spirit was with him all the summer, bringing her innocent presence into his opium-led reveries and dreams. He tasted something of the luxury of woe. He tells us that he often passed the night on her grave "in mere intensity of sick, frantic yearning after neighbourhood to" the darling of his heart. In broad daylight he would resort to certain upland fields where he knew he should see the sweet phantom; born, as it seemed, out of ferns and flowers; always coming towards him with a basket on her head, wearing "the little blue bedgown and black skirt of Westmorland."

When little Tom followed his sister in December, De Quincey was again absent, and the tidings met him at Liverpool on his way home. Wordsworth himself was his informant; and his letter breathes anything but estrangement. "Pray come to us," he wrote, "as soon as you can. . . . Most tenderly and lovingly, with heavy sorrow for you, my dear friend (it was the time of De Quincey's mysterious misfortune). I remain yours, W. Wordsworth."

Yet, for all this, the milk of De Quincey's feeling for Wordsworth was losing its sweetness, and there was never any return of the old fascination. The Wordsworths went to Rydal, and a new chapter of their life began. The pains of opium held De Quincey helpless for years. When recovery set in, his movements were more and more regulated by the exigencies of the journalistic career into which he had drifted, a career which, in those days as in these, a man could hardly follow satisfactorily among far-away mountains, even in a Paradise.

To London or Edinburgh—in those days as much an intellectual centre as London—or to the immediate neighbourhood of either, the journalist was inevitably drawn. De Quincey, after some years in London, fixed himself for the rest of his life in and near Edinburgh. For a time he was kept among the Lakes by his first definite journalistic job, the editorship of the *Westmorland Gazette*, which lasted for about a year, in 1819 and 1820. But he was made for higher things; and in September, 1821, the best of his mind began to appear to the world in the pages of the *London Magazine*, in the shape of the first instalment of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Henceforward, though Dove Cottage remained the home of his wife and children until 1830, and he was occasionally there, he could hardly consider himself the neighbour of Wordsworth.

De Quincey thought Wordsworth very "proud." As he put it, instead of calling him as proud as Lucifer, one ought to say that Lucifer may possibly be nearly as proud as Wordsworth. Yet, in 1814, Wordsworth was consulting De Quincey about *Laodamia*, and welcoming his criticisms deferentially. And two years later, Wordsworth was complaining that De Quincey had "taken a fit of solitude." One phase of the Wordsworthian "pride" galled De Quincey after his marriage in 1816. Good Margaret Simpson, the "statesman's" daughter of Rydal Nab, was not the kind of Mrs. De Quincey on whom Mr. and Mrs. Wordsworth felt they could call; or, if they called, they let the acquaintance drop at that point. There seems no doubt that the good woman suffered social neglect at their hands; and De Quincey was not philosophical enough not to wince. After his wife's death he wrote pathetically, with a reference which, though hidden, is unmistakable. "The hour is passed irrevocably and by many a year, in which an act of friendship so natural, and costing so little (in both senses so priceless) could have been availing. The ear is deaf that should have been solaced by the sound of welcome. Call, but you will not be heard; shout aloud, but your 'Ave!' and 'All hail!' will now tell only as an echo of departed days, proclaiming the hollowness of human hope."

In this painful situation, Dorothy seems to have tried to play the part of helper and healer. *She* went to Dove Cottage, with her bright eyes and enchanting sympathy, during De Quincey's

long absences; and when at last it was evident that Edinburgh was to be his home, it was Dorothy who suggested that he should move his family thither from Grasmere. She saw, she wrote to him, the sadness in his wife's manner; and she made bold to advise that the separation should be brought to an end; as in due time it was. To Edinburgh the family went; and there the wife and mother died and was buried.

But De Quincey was not wholly egoistic when he spoke of Wordsworth's pride. By "pride" he also and chiefly meant his serene self-consciousness, his lofty self-approval. And for that he had a good as well as a bad word. One of his best pieces of literary criticism occurs incidentally in an article on one of Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*, in which Landor and Southey discuss Milton. By one of the speakers, Wordsworth is reported to have spoken slightingly of Keats, and is blamed accordingly. De Quincey does not dwell long, though he dwells to much purpose, on Keats; but he says a good deal about Wordsworth, and especially about the nobler phase of his pride. The interlocutors put down Wordsworth's depreciation of Keats to envy. Any such idea De Quincey scouts utterly. "Wordsworth is a very proud man, as he has good reason to be. . . . But if proud, Wordsworth is not ostentatious, is not anxious for display, and least of all is he capable of descending to envy. Who or what is it that he should be envious of? Does anybody suppose that Wordsworth would be jealous of Archimedes if he now walked upon earth, or Michael Angelo, or Milton? Nature does not repeat herself. Be assured she will never make a second Wordsworth." Wordsworth, he means, was not only great, absolutely great, but unique. "If you show to Wordsworth a man as great as himself, still that great man will not be much *like* Wordsworth—the great man will not be Wordsworth's *doppelgänger*. If not *impar* (as you say) he will be *dispar;* and why, then, should Wordsworth be jealous of him? . . . But suddenly it strikes me that we are all proud, every man of us; and I dare say with some reason for it." De Quincey was in a rather riotously playful mood when he wrote this essay; and he soon passes into his characteristic *persiflage*. But, so far as Wordsworth was concerned, he, in the words which have been quoted, wrote, surely, with genuine magnanimity, genuine insight.

After years of habitual separation from the Lake Poets, De Quincey began to use them as copy. In the thirties, there appeared those *Recollections* of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey, from which, here and there, quotations have already been made. With Wordsworth De Quincey dealt much more handsomely than with Coleridge, with whom he wrangled as a rival opium-eater, and then abused for plagiarism, and one knows not what besides. Yet his touch on Wordsworth is not that of the hero-worshipper; it is hardly that of the friend. He tells *à propos* of nothing in particular that Wordsworth once, and only once, got drunk at Cambridge. By hints here and suggestions there, in a characterization meant to be exceedingly favourable, he manages to give the impression of a personality fundamentally unattractive. We are told, probably quite truly, that Wordsworth was incapable of the self-surrender without which a man cannot be a proper lover. We are told of occasional peevishness and ill-humour; we are given to understand a lack of amiability; we are assured of a total absence of gallantry. And Wordsworth's indifference to books is, in De Quincey's version of it, somehow made to show some shabbiness of mind as well as slenderness of purse. Much of the disillusionment suffered by Wordsworth in De Quincey's regard turned on the intellectual narrowness shown in his very partial and very one-sided interest in literature. That narrowness made the disillusion a loss of critical respect, as well as a diminution of personal affection. "It is impossible," wrote De Quincey, in his over-emphatic way, "to imagine the perplexity of mind which possessed me when I heard Wordsworth ridicule many books which I had been accustomed to admire profoundly." His one-sidedness in literary taste amounted to a deformity. He would praise mere nobodies and dispraise classics. De Quincey seriously doubted if he had ever read a page of Scott's novels. This was strange and shocking indeed, nor, of course, was it true. Yet, as regards Wordsworth's taste in fiction, it would seem that it was in one respect sounder than his *quondam* disciple's. For he read and admired Fielding, Smollett, and Le Sage, at whom De Quincey only turned up his nose. On the whole, De Quincey came to view Wordsworth as "a *mixed* creature, made up of special infirmity and special strength," and as "no longer capable of an equal friendship."

In the year 1845, five years before the poet's death, De Quincey composed a final critical estimate of Wordsworth. He announced it with something of a flourish of trumpets. It was to be an estimate of the poet's total work, a thing he had not attempted in the case of any writer before. Yet the achievement does not bear out the preface. The essay is little more than an outline, a series of reflections and notes, favourable and unfavourable, on Wordsworth's poetry, out of which a complete critical estimate might be made. But it has, at least, the importance of being De Quincey's last word on the subject, a word spoken at a long remove, in time and space, from irritating thoughts and irritated feelings.

"In calm of mind, all passion spent."

It is characteristic of the critic and of the developed relationship between the two men that he begins with dispraise. In the course of accounting for Wordsworth's early unpopularity, he falls upon his theory of poetic diction, with which, however, he fails to deal either exhaustively or very impressively. His conclusion, indeed, is that "the whole question moved by Wordsworth is still a *res integra* (a case untouched). And for this reason, that no sufficient specimen has ever been given of the particular phraseology which each party contemplates as good or as bad; no man in this dispute steadily understands even himself." So De Quincey takes his leave of poetic diction.

Then come his suggestions for praise. The first is recondite and subtle. Hazlitt remarked that Wordsworth dealt little in his poetry with "marrying and giving in marriage." "Well," replies De Quincey, "one man cannot deal with everything. But there is another reason why Wordsworth could not meddle with festal raptures like the glory of a wedding-day. These raptures are not only too brief, but (which is worse) they tend downwards; even for as long as they last, they do not move upon an ascending scale. And even *that* is not their worst fault: they do not diffuse or communicate themselves. . . . Mere joy, that does not linger and reproduce itself in reverberations and endless mirrors, is not fitted for poetry." This is hardly convincing. Spenser's *Epithalamium* * is surely poetry,

* De Quincey refers to Spenser's *Epithalamia* (*sic*), but only as poems which "nobody reads."

if poetry ever was; and it is made out of "mere joy" with no reverberations or reflections, no altruistic *arrière pensée* of any sort. Could Wordsworth not have written it only because he was more unselfish than Spenser, and *therefore* had truer insight into poetic fitness?

But De Quincey gives yet another and a better reason for Wordsworth's avoidance of unrelieved joy. Wordsworth, he thinks, was constitutionally obliged always to contemplate joy in relation to its opposites, to pain and grief. In illustration, he points to *Matthew*, and the cheerfulness born out of his sorrows; to *We are Seven*, and its blending of life so intense as to destroy death with the very idea of the death that is destroyed. "The little mountaineer, who furnishes the text for this lovely strain, she whose fulness of life could not brook the gloomy faith in a grave, is yet (for the effect upon the reader) brought into connection with the reflex shadows of the grave. . . . That same infant, which subjectively could not tolerate death, being by the reader contemplated objectively, flashes upon us the tenderest images of death." Here we feel that De Quincey is as sound as he is subtle. It was of the very essence of Wordsworth, as it must be of all the greatest men, to find no beauty in falsification; to be content with no sugaring of life for poetic purposes; no filtering of daylight through rose-coloured curtains. His joys were "three parts pain;" "the Comforter" was surest to find him at his heaviest moments; it was "sweet" to him when pleasant thoughts brought sad thoughts to his mind. He had reached *the faith which looks through death;* and the source of his joy was there.

De Quincey proceeds to give a brief account of some of the books of *The Excursion*. With the story of *Margaret* in Book I., and, indeed, with the whole poem, he deals in the spirit of Jeffrey rather than in that of Coleridge. "Not in *The Excursion*," he concludes, "must we look for that reversionary influence which awaits Wordsworth with posterity." We must look for it in his short poems; where we shall find it in their "truth"; their power of strengthening impressions already faintly made, or of suddenly unveiling "a connection between objects hitherto regarded as irrelate and independent." It is truth of Nature, truth of scenery, primarily, which it was Wordsworth's prerogative thus to reveal. From Shakespeare onwards such

revelation had been suspended. "At length, as the eighteenth century was winding up its accounts, forth stepped William Wordsworth, of whom, as a reader of all pages of Nature it may be said that, if we except Dampier, the admirable buccaneer, the gentle *flibustier*, and some few professional naturalists, he first and he last looked at natural objects with the eye that neither will be dazzled from without nor cheated by preconception from within." The careful student of Wordsworth will hardly be satisfied with this, in spite of its plausibility. For it conveys a wrong idea of Wordsworth's nature-poetry, of his attitude towards Nature and his method of dealing with her. It gives the impression of Wordsworth as a careful realist; a reproducer of Nature's *minutiæ*, without limitation and without *arrière pensée*. But it is not so; Wordsworth was far from being any such "naturalist" in verse. In spite of poems about pet lambs, greenfinches, cuckoos, and daffodils; in spite of poems about clouds and waterfalls, he was no poet of such objects in themselves, and those who go to him fancying that he was, will always be disappointed. He was a poet of the Universe and of Man; a poet of large vague objects and effects, of abstractions in their ultimate truth expressible only by suggestion. And the scenery of the Lake district, its flora and fauna, its clouds and waters, was used by Wordsworth, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the Universal Life and Beauty which informed them. Many readers of Wordsworth fail to grasp this; it is strange that De Quincey should be among them!

His insight is true when he speaks of Wordsworth as a revealer of spiritual truths in these human relations, and it helps him to a worthy leave-taking of the poet who, from first to last, had bulked so largely in his life. His early unpopularity in this respect came from no weakness or shortcoming; it was the inevitable result of the poet's originality and depth. "Whatever is too original will be hated at the first. It must slowly mould a public for itself. . . . Meditative poetry is, perhaps, that province of literature which will ultimately maintain most power amongst the generations which are coming; but in this department, at least, there is little competition to be apprehended by Wordsworth from anything that has appeared since the death of Shakespeare."

CHAPTER X

"THE FROLIC AND THE GENTLE"

OUR last glimpse of Charles Lamb was at the end of his holiday-week in 1797, in the return coach from Bridgwater to Bristol, on his way back to London ;—the India House, and the terrible problems of his tragedy-smitten home-life. A series of poems—too sacredly personal to be criticized as mere poetry—remains to show something of what the collapse of Lamb's first home meant to him. The week at Nether Stowey with Coleridge and the Wordsworths was but a tiny green islet in a "deep wide sea" of black weltering waves. Charles Lamb was only twenty-two, and he was to be before all things a humorist; but the grief which speaks in these verses is neither sentimental nor theatrical. His mother dead, we remember how; his sister in her shroud of alienation; his father stricken with palsy, and in a few months to follow his wife out of the world, what could compensate for all this? Even his good old aunt, who had been so kind to him in his school-days, so interested in his yellow coat, blue gown, and red belt—even she must needs leave him in this dark time!

> "Farewell, good aunt!
> Go thou and occupy the same grave-bed
> Where the dead mother lies."

In after-life, religion, in any of its more definite forms, did not play a great part in Charles Lamb's nature; literature, friendship, the patience of daily duty, and the sanctities of brotherly compassion and tenderness, seemed to suffice for that strange privileged being. But in those days of early sorrow, he was brought well within the circle of Christian thought and

consolation. Even when he hung over his mother's dead body, he felt—

> "The blest subsidings of the storm
> Within, the sweet resignedness of hope
> Drawn heavenward, and strength of filial love,
> In which I bow'd me to my Father's will."

That his poor father was soon taken was not the worst of his sorrows. That place was held by Mary's aberration and enforced absence from his hearth. Yet even under this load he would not sink, would hardly bend.

> "Yet I will not think,
> Sweet friend, but we shall one day meet, and live
> In quietness, and die so, fearing God."

Thus, in default of hope, resignation closes on as deep a note, surely, as it has ever sounded—

> "If *not*, and these false suggestions be
> A fit of the weak nature, loth to part
> With what it loved so long, and held so dear ;
> If thou art to be taken, and I left
> (More sinning, yet unpunished, save in thee),
> It is the will of God, and we are clay
> In the potter's hands ; and, at the worst, are made
> From absolute nothing, vessels of disgrace,
> Till, His most righteous purpose wrought in us,
> Our purified spirits find their perfect rest."

After such intimate breathings, the well-known *Old Familiar Faces*, with its quaint rhymeless austerity of reminiscence and regret, seems ordinary ; yet it belongs to the same date, and is directly linked with the central tragedy.

> "I had a mother, but she died and left me,
> Died prematurely in a day of horrors—
> All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "For some they have died, and some they have left me,
> *And some are taken from me ;* all are departed ;
> All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."

From Stowey, Lamb took back to London Wordsworth's friendship as a permanent possession ; and henceforward he must be regarded as a regular member of the "circle." He

was, indeed, a typical member of it: the friendship between the two men was constant; on Wordsworth's side, tenderly appreciative to the last hour of Lamb's life and beyond it; on Lamb's side, respectfully, but always critically, appreciative. Lamb was ten years older than De Quincey, and only five years younger than Wordsworth himself. He never took De Quincey's attitude of discipleship; he never felt the younger man's *engouement* for Wordsworth. Nor was he quite (if the expression may be allowed) of Wordsworth's kidney. He was one of the greatest of critics—much too great, too sympathetic, and too fully emancipated from the conventionalisms of the eighteenth-century tradition to attack Wordsworth as an innovator. But the greatest and most open-minded critic may have his favourites and favouritisms; his genius may have its natural starting-point, its chosen exercise-ground. Lamb's favouritism was for dramatic poetry; his *palaestra* was among the Elizabethans. His specific task was to revive the Elizabethans; to restore them to critical favour; to explain their inward significance. And after the Elizabethans proper, he loved poets like Cowley and Wither. "Meditative" poetry (to use De Quincey's favourite epithet), like Wordsworth's, had no special relish for him.

In many respects, Lamb's affinities were with Coleridge, the friend through whom he came to know Wordsworth, rather than with Wordsworth himself. Both critics had a much wider outlook over literature than Wordsworth; both were full of Elizabethan and dramatic sympathies. Nor were their direct attitudes to Wordsworth so very different. True, Coleridge was Wordsworth's colleague; together they planned a new poetry; together they issued *Lyrical Ballads*. But there collaboration ceased. Wordsworth's theories of poetry, especially his theories of poetic diction and imagination, he worked out alone; Coleridge was interested and appreciative, but always critical, and sometimes, as we know, disapproving. Very much the same was it with Lamb. He saw too deeply into the facts of style to take up the "poetic diction" polemic. When the first *Lyrical Ballads* came out, it was evidently the *Ancient Mariner* that impressed him most. When the second issue appeared, he wrote to Wordsworth appreciatively and discriminatingly; but still it was the *Ancient Mariner* that seemed to bulk

largest. He told him how much he liked the *Lucy* poems, the "*Sexton*" and others. He complained of "the common satire upon parsons and lawyers in the beginning" of *A Poet's Epitaph*, and "the coarse epithet of 'pin-point'" in the first version of the sixth stanza. He objected to the didactic strain in "*The Beggar*." "The instructions conveyed in it are too direct, and like a lecture; they don't slide into the mind of the reader while he is imagining no such matter. An intelligent reader finds a sort of insult on being told, 'I will teach you how to think upon this subject.' This fault, if I am right, is in a ten-thousandth worse degree to be found in Sterne, and in many novelists and modern poets, who continually put a sign-post up to show where you are to feel. They set out with assuming their readers to be stupid; very different from *Robinson Crusoe*, the *Vicar of Wakefield*, *Roderick Random*, and other beautiful, bare narratives." "Well and good, Master Charles," Wordsworth might have replied; "but *Tristram Shandy* is as good and lasting stuff as *Roderick Random* any day." Then Lamb harks back to the *Mariner*. "For me, I was never so affected by any human tale. After first reading it, I was totally possessed with it for many days." He thought Wordsworth failed to appreciate it enough. "I totally differ from your idea that the *Mariner* should have had a character and profession. . . . Your other observation is, I think as well, a little unfounded; the *Mariner*, from being conversant in supernatural events, *has* acquired a supernatural and strange cast of phrase, eye, appearance, etc., which frighten the wedding guest. You will excuse my remarks, because I am hurt and vexed that you should think it necessary, with a prose apology, to open the eyes of dead men that cannot see." And he concludes: "To sum up a general opinion of the second volume, I do not feel any one poem in it so forcibly as the *Ancient Mariner* and *The Mad Mother* and the *Lines at Tintern Abbey* in the first." What was unfavourable in this criticism roused Wordsworth to quick self-defence, which disgusted Lamb. The most reluctant of letter-writers, as Wordsworth professed himself, lost no time, Lamb sarcastically observed, in answering this letter. Possibly, he was riled by the inaccurate titles given by Lamb to the poems he referred to; anyhow, the less noble side of his egoism seems to have shown itself in his letter. He expressed himself as

"compelled to wish that my [Lamb's] range of sensibility was more extended, being obliged to believe that I should receive large influxes of happiness and happy thoughts." He discoursed, in the technical phraseology affected by him, about the union of tenderness and imagination, in a way which seemed to Lamb to indicate that he put himself above Shakespeare. Altogether the critic was punished with "four sweating pages" of rebuke and self-exposition. Nor was this all, Coleridge sprang to the aid of his collaborator, and inflicted on Lamb four more pages, "equally sweaty and more tedious," the upshot of which was that, when one did not care for anything of Wordsworth's, the fault must be one's own. "What," exclaimed Lamb, in humorous despair, "am I to do with such people?" Yet, even in this mood, Lamb was far from feeling about any of Wordsworth's poetry as Jeffrey did. He thought the volume full of originality and observation. He so admired "She dwelt among the untrodden ways," as to copy the whole of it in a letter. "This," he commented, "is choice and genuine, and so are many, many more." But in the volume as a whole he felt that there was too deliberate an aim at simplicity.

Lamb, in truth, was out and out a Londoner; and his sympathies were more concretely human, less abstract and rural, than Wordsworth's. Wordsworth invited him to come to Grasmere. Lamb's reply, as Mr. Knight has pointed out, shows the characteristic differences between the two men. Lamb doubted whether he should ever be able to afford so long a journey. But that was not all. "Separate from the pleasure of your company, I don't much care if I never see a mountain in my life. I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments as any of you mountaineers can have done with dead Nature. The lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street . . . all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden . . . the watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles . . . the impossibility of being dull in Fleet Street; the crowds, the very dirt and mud. . . . Steams of soups from kitchens . . . all those things work themselves into my mind, and feed me. . . . I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fulness of joy at so much life. All these emotions must be strange to you; so are your rural emotions to me." He even feels inclined to pity Wordsworth for his preference.

"I should pity you, did I not know that the mind will make friends of anything. Your sun, and moon, and skies, and hills, and lakes, affect me no more, or scarcely come to me in more venerable characters, than as a gilded room with tapestry and tapers. . . . I consider the clouds above me but as a roof beautifully painted, but unable to satisfy the mind. . . . So fading upon me, from disuse, have been the beauties of Nature, as they have been confinedly called; so ever fresh and green and warm are all the inventions of men, and assembling of men, in this great city."

Yet, in thus humorously sharpening the antithesis, Lamb was showing himself a more incomplete philosopher than probably in reality he was. *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*, of course, were as yet non-existent; and no reader of Wordsworth yet knew how human, in one sense, the sources of his poetry were. But Lamb ought to have recognized the very real, though deeply hidden bond, which unites urban and rural phenomena in one comprehensive conception of Nature. Lamb's analysis of his London pleasure reads like an anticipation of Walt Whitman; and, indeed, it was left for Walt Whitman—in one respect, at least, Wordsworth's true continuator—to show that the poet's world has no exclusions, and that the Universal Spirit, which gives Nature its meaning and charm, is at work on the crowded bridge as in the mountain solitude, in the thickest press of human toil as much as in remote places where men are sparsely sown.

However, the Lakes did at last draw the Lambs to their bosom; but it was not Wordsworth that they went to see. In 1802, the year of Wordsworth's marriage, and while he was away on the long absence which ended in that event, Charles and Mary Lamb paid a surprise visit to Coleridge at Greta Hall. While Wordsworth was writing sonnets at Calais, the Lambs were making acquaintance with Skiddaw and Blencathara, and the folded hills between Derwentwater and Buttermere. In a post-chaise they came from Penrith in a glorious summer evening, "in a gorgeous sunshine, which transmuted all the mountains into colours." Such evenings are none too common in that land of watery veils; and there were no more fine sunsets, though the Lambs stayed three weeks. Lamb found that the beauties of the land spoke to his imagination

after all. The weather on the night of arrival was lucky; and then there was the impression of Coleridge's study, with the blazing fire which all good Lake dwellers allow themselves in the finest summer evenings. The "large antique ill-shaped room, with an old-fashioned organ, never played upon, big enough for a church, shelves of scattered folios, an Æolian harp, and an old sofa, half bed, etc." Above all, there was the vast bulk of Skiddaw "and his broad-breasted brethren," which seems to have dominated Lamb's imagination as well as his field of vision. He writes the word "Skiddaw" seven times in the course of one not very long letter. He climbed the hill with Mary, rejoicing in the walk and the view; the mountain's "fine black head, and the bleak air atop of it, with a prospect of mountains all about and about, making you giddy; and then Scotland afar off, and the border countries, so famous in song and ballad! It was a day that will stand out like a mountain, I am sure, in my life." When first he got back to the Temple after all this, Lamb felt *small*, as though denuded of ideals. But he was soon hugging himself as a Londoner again. It was better to live in Fleet Street and the Strand than "amidst Skiddaw." "After all, I could not *live* in Skiddaw." "Still, Skiddaw is a fine creature."

In their hospitable way, the Wordsworths allowed the Lambs to stay a day or two at Dove Cottage in their absence —the Clarksons, whose own dwelling was near Ullswater, doing the housekeeping. But it was in London, after their return, that Charles and Mary saw the Wordsworths that year. The Wordsworths dined with them at the Temple, and the Lambs took them to see some of the sights. A month or two later, Charles was forwarding, in a parcel to Coleridge, books which Wordsworth had left behind, and "strange thick-hoofed shoes which are very much admired in London." We can fancy the look of them!

The Lambs never again ventured as far as Lakeland; and future intercourse with Wordsworth was all in London, during the poet's fairly frequent visits. The friendship was established; and so was the cordial literary appreciation—on Lamb's part always without infatuation or even glamour. As in the friendship with De Quincey, Dorothy was a powerful link. There was much similarity between Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary

Lamb; both were gifted and literary; both had quick sensibilities and rare powers of intellectual sympathy; in both, alas! the nervous mechanism broke down under the strain of thought and feeling. One of the most touching of Charles Lamb's letters is to Dorothy in the summer of 1805, during one of his sister's absences through mental illness. To no one else did he ever so completely lay open the sad recurrent wound. It seems almost profanation to quote from, or even to publish, such utterance; the agonizing love, the distracting perplexity, the broken and the contrite heart (for Lamb knew that his own part in the dual life was sadly flawed), which surely in this case would not be despised. He tenderly quotes some pretty verses of his sister's, and concludes: "This is a little unfair, to tell so much about ourselves, and to advert so little to your letter, so full of comfortable tidings of you all. . . . That you may go on recovering strength and peace is my next wish to Mary's recovery."

Twelve years later, when the Lambs moved into Russell Street, Covent Garden, we find Mary writing lovingly to Dorothy, and wishing that "Rydal Mount, with all its inhabitants enclosed," could be transplanted into the midst of Covent Garden. "I hope we shall meet," she goes on, "before the walking faculties of either of us fail; you say you can walk fifteen miles with ease, [people used to think Dorothy overwalked herself into premature senility] that is exactly my stint, and more fatigues me."

Charles Lamb was quick to congratulate Wordsworth on the birth of his son Thomas in 1806; and he promptly took him into his confidence about the failure of his farce, *Mr. H.*, as also about his and Mary's better-starred enterprise, the *Tales from Shakespeare*. He never lost his sense of a certain self-blindness, a certain *conceit*, in Wordsworth; he never considered himself as much his partisan as Coleridge was. Thus, in 1808, just before a London visit of Wordsworth's, we find Lamb writing: "Wordsworth, the great poet, is coming to town; he is to have apartments in the Mansion House. He says he does not see much difficulty in writing like Shakespeare, if he had a mind to try it. It is clear, then, nothing is wanting but the mind. Even Coleridge a little checked at this hardihood of assertion."

Yet we must not make too much of such little asides. Lamb knew Wordsworth's magnitude, and was not backward to acknowledge it. Even about the *Convention of Cintra* pamphlet he was enthusiastic. "Its power over me," he wrote to Coleridge, "was like that which Milton's pamphlets must have had on his contemporaries, who were tuned to them. What a piece of prose!"

When *The Excursion* came out in 1814, Lamb praised it heartily, as we shall see in the last chapter.

Then, in 1815, came the first collective edition of the poems, with one of the critical essays. Now was Lamb's first introduction to such things as *Laodamia* and *There is a Yew-tree;* and now, indeed, he bowed his head. For the moment, and in addressing Wordsworth himself, he came very near enrolling himself with the Wordsworthians proper. He was afraid Wordsworth would concede even an image or a phrase to the conventional critics. "I would not have had you offer up the poorest rag that lingered upon the stript shoulders of little Alice Fell, to have atoned all their malice; I would not have given 'em a red cloak to save their souls." Yet it is all, of course, contemporary criticism of a contemporary; it is not the homage of posterity to a classic, which, in the nature of the case, is a very different matter. He cannot resist his joke. *What is good for a bootless bene?* he suddenly asked Mary, as he turned the pages. *A shoeless pea*, she promptly replied. With Wordsworth's discourse on imagination, Lamb professed himself satisfied.

When *Peter Bell* was published in 1819, Lamb complained of it as being too *lyrical.* It is not quite clear what he means by the word in this connection. He seems to have specially resented the form of the poem, by which a group of people, "The Vicar and his Dame," "Stephen Otter," and the rest, are interposed between the poet and his reader; but there is nothing *lyrical* in such a form. He said, in 1811, to Henry Crabb Robinson, the delightful diarist, and most literary of barristers, in the course of a conversation in which he asserted Coleridge's superiority to Wordsworth, that Wordsworth *forced the reader to submit to his individual feelings*, instead of, like Shakespeare, *becoming everything he pleased.* The evidential value of reported talk is very slight: so much depends on

context, on tone, and a score of things which the diarist does not or cannot record. The above *dictum*, as it stands, is so discreditable to Lamb's critical power, that one feels something essential must be left out. Certainly the critical honours were with Crabb Robinson, when he rejoined that this so-called inferiority "lay very much in the lyrical character." Still, Lamb must have said something of the sort; and it is probably true that Wordsworth was "too lyrical," too abstract, too egoistic—in the sense in which all lyrical poetry tends to be egoistic—to ravish the heart of one so dramatic and concretely human as the Fleet Street-loving Charles Lamb.

Lamb had a great fancy for another humorously didactic poem of Wordsworth's, *The Waggoner*. It had been written in 1805, and Lamb had seen it in manuscript. He persuaded Wordsworth to publish it immediately after *Peter Bell;* and the poet pleased him by a gracious, though very temperate, dedicatory letter, in which he acknowledged the pleasure he had derived from Lamb's writings, and the "high esteem" with which he was truly his. (We must remember that there were as yet no *Essays of Elia*, and that the only writings of Lamb's from which Wordsworth, in 1819, could derive pleasure, were *Rosamond Gray*, *John Woodvill*, some of the *Tales from Shakespeare*, the notes to the *Specimens of Dramatic Poetry*, and one or two critical essays.) Lamb did well, certainly, to unearth the story, so delightfully and so humorously told, of the thirsty carter and his toiling team; he rightly praised the "beautiful tolerance" of the poem. For, alas! Benjamin, the waggoner, was, as we have hinted, and as Burns would have called him, a "drouthy neebor"; and every inn between Ambleside and Keswick was for him a door into the nether regions. The poem follows him on one of his northward journeys, full of good resolutions; past the "Dove and Olive Bough" at Town End, past the "Swan" at Grasmere, his virtue as yet quite safe. But on the ascent of the Raise, there is a bewildering thunderstorm in the hot June night, and the waggoner forgathers with a sailor and his wife. The sailor has a donkey, and his wife a baby; and the two storm-stressed parties join together, the woman and her child safe under the hood of the waggon. As they pass Wytheburn, on the drop to Thirlmere, the fatal sounds of fiddling issue from the "Cherry

Tree," and Benjamin's virtue gives way under the new strain.

> "Nor has thought time to come and go,
> To vibrate between yes and no;
> For, cries the Sailor, 'Glorious chance
> That blows us hither!—let him dance,
> Who can or will!—my honest soul,
> Our treat shall be a friendly bowl!'
> He draws him to the door, 'Come in,
> Come, come,' cries he to Benjamin!
> And Benjamin—ah, woe is me!
> Gave the word—the horses heard
> And halted, though reluctantly."

After some flowing bowls have circulated, the sailor goes out, and returns with a wonderful model of a man-of-war—the *Vanguard*, flagship at the Battle of the Nile; and at sight of it, and of the very spot where Nelson stood, the fiddlers and the dancers cease, and you might hear a mouse nibble. But then, on Benjamin's motion, they must drink to the great admiral, though the very mastiff, chained under the waggon outside, rattles his chain in protest. After two hours of this kind of thing, the cavalcade starts again for the run by the lake, the mastiff and the donkey tied side by side, much to their mutual inconvenience, and the—

> "*Vanguard*, following close behind,
> Sails spread, as if to catch the wind!"

At last come the signs of morning; the waking of the birds in St. John's Vale; the rosy light on Skiddaw. Here lies the imaginative value of the poem; in the contrast and antagonism so subtly indicated, between the nocturnal pleasures of the "Cherry Tree," and the beauties of the morning.

> "The mists, that o'er the streamlet's bed
> Hung low, begin to rise and spread;
> Even while I speak, their skirts of grey
> Are smitten by a silver ray;
> And lo!—up Castrigg's naked steep
> (Where, smoothly urged, the vapours sweep
> Along—and scatter and divide,
> Like fleecy clouds self-multiplied)
> The stately waggon is ascending,
> With faithful Benjamin attending,
> Apparent now beside his team—
> Now lost amid a glittering steam:

And with him goes his Sailor-friend,
By this time near their journey's end ;
And, after their high-minded riot,
Sickening into thoughtful quiet ;
As if the morning's pleasant hour
Had for their joys a killing power.
And, sooth, for Benjamin a vein
Is opened of still deeper pain
As if his heart by notes were stung
From out the lowly hedge-rows flung ;
As if the Warbler lost in light
Reproved his soarings of the night."

The *dénoument* may be fancied ; the wrath of Benjamin's master at the fresh outbreak ; the enigmatical appearance of the party, and the Waggoner's final dismissal.

" All past forgiveness is repealed ;
And thus, and through distempered blood
On both sides, Benjamin the good,
The patient, and the tender-hearted,
Was from his team and waggon parted ;
When duty of that day was o'er,
Laid down his whip—and served no more."

Excellent as *The Waggoner* is, Wordsworth was right when he felt that in *Peter Bell* there were " a higher tone of imagination " and " deeper touches of feeling." Lamb sturdily preferred *The Waggoner ;* partly, perhaps, because (and, indeed, so he plainly hints) he was himself sensitive to Benjamin's temptations. " Methinks there is a kind of shadowing affinity between the subject of the narrative and the subject of the dedication."

The Lambs' modest London dwellings continued to be regular resorts of Wordsworth as the years went on, and the friendship never felt the passage of a single cloud. There is a delightful letter of Charles's to Dorothy Wordsworth, dated November 25, 1819, in which the writer describes his experiences in introducing little Willy Wordsworth, the poet's youngest child, now a boy of nine, to the London sights. " Till yesterday," Lamb writes, " I had barely seen him [Willy], but yesterday he gave us his small company to a bullock's heart, and I can pronounce him a lad of promise. . . . He has observation, and seems thoroughly awake. . . . Being taken over Waterloo

Bridge, he remarked, that if we had no mountains, we had a fine river at least; which was a touch of the comparative: but then he added, in a strain which argued less for his future abilities as a political economist, that he supposed they must take at least a pound a week toll. Like a curious naturalist, he inquired if the tide did not come up a little salty. . . . He put another question, as to the flux and reflux; which being rather cunningly evaded than artfully solved by that she-Aristotle, Mary—who muttered something about its getting up an hour sooner and sooner every day—he sagely replied, 'Then it must come to the same thing at last;' which was a speech worthy of an infant Halley! The lion in the 'Change by no means came up to his ideal standard; so impossible is it for Nature, in any of her works, to come up to the standard of a child's imagination! . . . William's genius, I take it, leans a little to the figurative; for, being at play at tricktrack (a kind of minor billiard-table, which we keep for smaller wights, and sometimes refresh our own mature fatigues with taking a hand at), not being able to hit a ball he had iterate aimed at, he cried out, 'I cannot hit that beast!' Now the balls are usually called men, but he felicitously hit upon a middle term; a term of approximation and imaginative reconciliation; a something where the two ends of the brute matter (ivory), and their human and rather violent personification into men, might meet, as I take it—illustrative of that excellent remark, in a certain preface, about imagination, explaining, 'Like a sea-beast that had crawled forth to sun himself!'* Not that I accuse William Minor of hereditary plagiary, or conceive the image to have come *ex traduce*. Rather he seemeth to keep aloof from any source of imitation, and purposely to remain ignorant of what mighty poets have done in this kind before him; for, being asked if his father had ever been on Westminster Bridge, he answered that he did not know!"†

In 1820 began the last and most fruitful section of Charles Lamb's life; for it was in August of that year that the first essay signed "Elia" came out in the *London Magazine*—the

* The echo of a phrase from *Resolution and Independence*.

† The allusion, of course, is to Wordworth's great sonnet, beginning—

"Earth has not anything to show more fair."

vehicle, as we remember, of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. The world will always know and love Lamb as the essayist and letter-writer—the essayist in him being but the letter-writer transfigured,—the revealer, under the restraint of a dignified tradition, and on the impulse of mature literary power, of the rich, quaint, lovable personality already well known to his correspondents. Month after month the exquisite essays stole forth, "taking" the air with their fragrance—a fragrance like that of the old *Spectator*, but deeper, sweeter, subtler; with the Addisonian grace and humour, and unspoiled by the Addisonian woodenness, the Addisonian conventionalism. The *Essays of Elia*, appearing when they did, formed one of the best links between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, having all the sanity, the lucidity, the placid reflectiveness of the past age, and much of the freshness, the truer pathos, the purer humour, the courageous individuality, the lyrical charm, of the new. If one cannot speak of Lamb as exhibiting the "Renascence of Wonder" in the strict sense of the words, one can most literally describe him as a child of the Romantic Revival.

Fourteen years—no more—passed between the first *Essay of Elia* and Charles Lamb's quiet death at Edmonton in 1834. A large part of the charm of the essays lies in their directly autobiographical character; in the portrayal, absolutely faithful under every *alias*, of the writer, his relations, his friends, the scenery of the different stages of his life. Delicious summer days in Hertfordshire, nourishing the dreamy bookish childhood; the cloisters of Christ's and the purlieus of the Temple; holiday-rambles to Margate, to Oxford, but seldom very far afield; the love-tragedy, with the rainbow-faces of "dream-children" heightening it. Mary, needing hardly any of her brother's idealism to deepen the pathos and heighten the charm of the figure; evenings over books or whist; occasional visits to the play; such is the stuff of the essays. Their chief scenery is furnished by the streets of London; and through them all we never lose sight of the spare, knee-breeched figure with the curling hair and dark, high-nosed, Jewish-looking face, the courteous manners, the ready smile, and the incurable stammer, day by day walking swiftly eastwards to his clerk's work at the India House, and westward or north-westward again in the late afternoon to quiet literary or social evenings. More and more irksome became the

CHARLES LAMB (AGED ABOUT 50)

FROM THE DRAWING BY THOMAS WAGEMAN IN 1824 OR 1825

clerkly drudgery, until at last, in 1825, it was got rid of, and Lamb could escape to more country surroundings, first at Enfield, then at Edmonton. In those later years the intercourse with the Wordsworths was more intermittent, and the correspondence flagged. But it was none the less congenial. "I wish," wrote Dorothy to Crabb Robinson, in the year after Lamb's retirement; "I wish they [the Lambs] would now and then let us see their handwriting; a single page from Charles Lamb is worth ten postages." There were occasional letters, occasional meetings; and the friendship was strong as death. One or two of the richest and most vivid of Lamb's latest letters are to Wordsworth. In January, 1830, he writes describing the lights and shadows of his superannuated life in Enfield lodgings. On the whole, the shadows predominate. "There are not now the years that there used to be. . . . We have taken a farewell of the pompous troublesome life called housekeeping. . . . We have nothing to do with our victuals but to eat them; with the garden, but to see it grow; with the tax-gatherer, but to hear him knock. . . . We are fed, we know not how; quietists—confiding ravens. . . . In dreams I am in Fleet Market, but I wake, and cry to sleep again. . . . What have I gained by health? Intolerable dulness. What by early hours and moderate meals? A total blank." He hits off Enfield: "A little teazing image of a town . . . shops two yards square, half-a-dozen apples, and two penn'orth of overlooked ginger-bread . . . a circulating library that stands still, where the show-picture is a last year's Valentine, and whither the fame of the last ten Scotch novels [so the *Waverleys* were often called in those days] has not yet travelled—(marry, they just begin to be conscious of the *Redgauntlet*), to have a new plastered flat church, and to be wishing that it was but a cathedral! The very blackguards here are degenerate." One supposes that Lamb always loved to sing the praises of London in the pastoral Wordsworth's ear. Wordsworth's eyesight gave him much trouble. "From my den I return you condolence for your decaying sight; not for anything there is to see in the country, but for the miss of the pleasure of reading a London newspaper. . . . The last long time I heard from you, you had knocked your head against something. Do not do so; for your head (I do not flatter) is not a knob, or the top of a brass nail, or the end of a nine-pin—unless a

Vulcanian hammer could fairly batter a 'Recluse' out of it; then would I bid the smirched god knock, and knock lustily, the two-handed skinker."

Three years later, he writes under new shadows, shadows admitting of no humorous exaggeration. The mental cloud that was never to lift was falling on Dorothy Wordsworth, and Mary was again very ill. "Her illnesses," he wrote, "encroach yearly . . . half her life she is dead to me, and the other half is made anxious with fears and lookings forward to the next shock. . . . I see little of her. . . . *Sunt lachrymæ rerum!* and you and I must bear it."

In this letter, Lamb thanks Wordsworth for his "cordial reception of *Elia*." We possess the letter to which Lamb's was a reply. Wordsworth had written—"I have to thank you and Moxon for a delightful volume, not, I hope, your last, of *Elia*. I have read it all, except some of the popular fallacies which I reserve, not to get through my cake all at once. . . . I am not sure but I like the *Old China* and *The Wedding* as well as any of the essays. I read *Love me and love my Dog* to my sister this morning. . . . She was much pleased."

In the February before Lamb's death he wrote his last surviving letter to Wordsworth. It is short, and its theme is of transitory interest, but one or two phrases make it immortal for us here. He asked Wordsworth to help a *protégée* at Carlisle. "O, if you can recommend her, how would I love you—if I could love you better! . . . Moxon tells me you would like a letter from me; you shall have one. *This* I cannot mingle up with any nonsense which you usually tolerate from C. Lamb. Need he add loves to wife, sister, and all? Poor Mary is ill again, after a short lucid interval of four or five months. . . . Good you are to me. Yours, with fervour of friendship, for ever."

In July, 1834, Coleridge died at Highgate. The death was saddening to Wordsworth, but shattering to Lamb. Wordsworth and Coleridge had hardly met for twenty years; yet, as Wordsworth told Coleridge's son, "his mind has been habitually present with me." To Lamb, the loss of Coleridge was the loss of a vital part of himself. He has recorded that he heard of the death "without grief"; but that was only because the hurt was "too deep for tears." Coleridge's spirit haunted him, bringing

an acute sense of desolation. "I cannot think a thought, I cannot make a criticism on men or books, without an ineffectual turning and reference to him." He would suddenly exclaim, in the midst of ordinary conversation, when the fact gripped him, *Coleridge is dead!* He was not long to suffer under the deprivation. In December, 1834, his own hour struck. A trip on the road, a fall, a slight face-wound; then some hours' erysipelas; and Charles Lamb was gone. Mary was too ill to realize what had happened.

Dorothy Wordsworth also could hardly realize the event. But Wordsworth himself bore noble tribute to it. In 1835, he wrote a poem commemorating Lamb, and in after years a kind of prose appreciation, by way of preface. Moxon had asked for an epitaph or elegy; and Wordsworth immediately, with his habitual fluency, wrote a series of verses which could not be inscribed on Lamb's gravestone, partly because of their length, partly because of the intimacy of their revelations. If the "epitaph" is not one of Wordsworth's greatest poems, it at least contains some admirable appreciation, at once sympathetic and discriminating, of Lamb. Wordsworth truly loved his odd London friend, though he regretted some of his characteristics, his unwise conviviality, and what, to the grave, scantily humorous poet, seemed his over-indulged quizzicality. His tendency to banter seemed to show a lack of sincerity. Wordsworth thought that both Coleridge and he had learned a kind of superficial untruthfulness of mind at Christ's.

Yet, when Lamb died, it was his *goodness* that stood out before Wordsworth's mind in strongest relief.

> "To a good Man of most dear memory
> This Stone is sacred."

Faults he had, as we all have; yet he was, before all things, innocent, like the creature whose name he bore.

> "From the most gentle creature nursed in fields
> Had been derived the name he bore—a name,
> Wherever Christian altars have been raised,
> Hallowed to meekness and to innocence;
> And if in him meekness at times gave way,
> Provoked out of herself by troubles strange,
> Many and strange, that hung about his life;
> Still, at the centre of his being, lodged
> A soul by resignation sanctified:

And if too often, self-reproached, he felt
That innocence belongs not to our kind,
A power that never ceased to abide in him,
Charity, 'mid the multitude of sins
That she can cover, left not his exposed
To an unforgiving judgment from just Heaven.
Oh, he was good, if e'er a good Man lived!"

His genius is admirably characterized; his—

"Knowledge and wisdom, gained from converse sweet
With books, or while he ranged the crowded streets
With a keen eye, and overflowing heart,"

pouring out—

"Truth in works by thoughtful love
Inspired—works potent over smiles and tears,
And, as round mountain-tops the lightning plays,
Thus innocently sported, breaking forth
As from a cloud of some grave sympathy,
Humour and wild instinctive wit, and all
The vivid flashes of his spoken words."

The poet cannot forget Lamb's scorn of the country; but he recognizes that it was only half sincere, and he feels no unfitness in his burial in a rural place.

"Thou wert a scorner of the fields, my Friend,
But more in show than truth; and from the fields,
And from the mountains, to thy rural grave
Transported, my soothed spirit hovers o'er
The green untrodden turf, and blowing flowers."

The wonderful bond between brother and sister, itself a great poem, is amply celebrated in Wordsworth's lines. Mary Lamb, ten years her brother's senior, had at first been to him as a mother.

"When years
Lifting the boy to man's estate, had called
The long-protected to assume the part
Of the protector, the first filial tie
Was undissolved; and, in or out of sight,
Remained imperishably interwoven
With life itself."

In spite of all the adversity and tragedy, Mary was—

"The meek,
The self-restraining, and the ever-kind;"

and—

"Thro' all visitations and all trials,"

the brother and sister were faithful ;

> "Like two vessels launched
> From the same beach one ocean to explore
> With mutual help, and sailing—to their league
> True, as inexorable winds, or bars
> Floating or fixed of polar ice, allow."

And the lines end worthily on the image of the two-in-one—

> "O gift divine of quiet sequestration !
> The hermit, exercised in prayer and praise,
> And feeding daily on the hope of heaven,
> Is happy in his vow . . . but happier far
> Was to your souls, and, to the thoughts of others,
> A thousand times more beautiful appeared,
> Your *dual* loneliness. The sacred tie
> Is broken ; yet why grieve? for Time but holds
> His moiety in trust."

With the truth and love of this careful tribute we are well satisfied. But perhaps the phrase in the *Extempore Effusion on the Death of James Hogg* written in the same year, the phrase dedicated to Lamb, in the stanzas sacred to him and to Coleridge, speaks with equal truth and a deeper tenderness.

> "Nor has the rolling year twice measured
> From sign to sign its steadfast course,
> Since every mortal power of Coleridge
> Was frozen at its marvellous source ;
>
> "The rapt one, of the godlike forehead,
> The heaven-eyed creature sleeps in earth ;
> And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,
> Has vanished from his lonely hearth."

CHAPTER XI

WORDSWORTH, SCOTT, AND CHRISTOPHER NORTH

IT is tempting to compare and contrast Wordsworth and Walter Scott. Born within a year of one another, both men were burly, honest northerners ; both were intense patriots ; both were chivalrously devoted to literature ; both were great literary originators and reformers. Nor was this all. Both, in a remarkable degree, gave spiritual significance to the regions in which their lots were cast. To a greater extent than any other single man, Scott gave Scotland, topographical Scotland, modern Scotland, a *soul.* He revealed it to the world, not as a guide-book, but as a poet, does. And, similarly, Wordsworth was much more than a dweller among the Lakes ; he became the very "breath and finer spirit" of them all ; in his genius they live and have their being.

The parallelism can hardly be extended. As poets, indeed, Wordsworth and Scott were nearer than they knew, and than Wordsworth's rather scornful estimate allowed ; nearer in their lyrical strain, nearer in their feeling for Nature. But their intellectual methods were essentially dissimilar. Wordsworth was intensely subjective, Scott cheerily and self-effacingly objective. Wordsworth never wrote without looking into his own thinking and feeling interior ; Scott wrote only about an external world, conceived by him as such, and nothing more. All his life Scott was looking on at a splendid pageantry, and showing it to mankind, he himself being a mere showman, hardly visible. For Wordsworth, too, there was a pageant—a pageant of Nature, a pageant of Man ; but it was mysteriously unrolled out of his own intelligence and imagination ; externality supplied only raw material and stimulus. So far from being self-effacing, Wordsworth had much of that egoism which,

as Coleridge said about Milton, is a revelation of spirit—spirit which is universal. In a word, Wordsworth was a philosopher; Scott was not.

Again, in Romanticism they took widely different ways. Except in parts of his poetry, those parts most lyrically inspired, and except in his Scottish character-drawing, Scott, in his Romanticism, never got much beyond the mere idealization of medievalism and feudalism. "Gothicism" of this kind was never much to Wordsworth. His point of view was too universal to incline him to it; it was too heavily laden with trappings and tinsel for his naked simplicity of taste. Even the *Ancient Mariner*, the most arrestingly distinctive of *Lyrical Ballads*, was too romantic for him. As the *Ancient Mariner* is to the *Tintern Abbey* lines, so—we may put it—was the Romanticism which Scott practised to the romance of Wordsworth.

Yet the two great pioneers were excellent friends. Scott was sweetly, wholly, loyal to, and admiring of, Wordsworth; Wordsworth, though he sniffed at Scott's poetry, and almost ignored his novels, loved the man, and felt, in spite of himself, his greatness. They met for the first time in 1803, the year when Wordsworth first set foot in Scotland. It was a great year in Wordsworth's life, not only because he first saw Scott and Scotland, but because he found there one of the critical inspirations of his poetry. It was a great year also in Dorothy's life, because she was her brother's companion, and has left her impressions in a diary which is a kind of Wordsworthian prose-poem. In August, 1803, they set out with Coleridge, Mrs. Wordsworth staying at home with her two-months'-old first baby. Coleridge played his wonted unsatisfactory part in the expedition. He was, as Wordsworth said, "in bad spirits, and somewhat too much in love with his own dejection." He got as far as Loch Lomond; but in the third week of the tour, the abundant and apparently endless Scottish rains in a west country August so completed his dejection that at Tarbet he "determined to send his clothes to Edinburgh and make the best of his way thither." They left Arrochar all together. "Coleridge accompanied us a little way; we portioned out the contents of our purse before our parting; and, after we had lost sight of him, drove heavily along." So Dorothy wrote. We may be sure that the heaviness was not caused by mud alone.

Many a sigh Coleridge drew from that sympathetic heart from first to last. In the solemn recesses of Glen Croe her thoughts were "full of Coleridge," and the image of him "sickly and alone" was as depressing as the savage place in the bleak weather.

Coleridge apart, the tour was a bright success. The travellers progressed at their leisure, in an Irish car drawn by one not too amiable horse, by way of Carlisle to Dumfries. Here Wordsworth did homage to Burns, who had lain just seven years in his grave in St. Michael's kirkyard, no stone as yet marking the place. He did his utmost towards a just estimate of his great predecessor. He wrote three poems in Burns's own characteristic metre, in which moral, hardly, if at all, outweighs literary, criticism. The spiritual kinship between himself and the Scottish lyrist he fully recognizes. They were "true friends, though diversely inclined." As he looked across the Solway to the dim heights of Skiddaw, he regretted that he had not known Burns.

> "Huge Criffel's hoary top ascends
> By Skiddaw seen;
> Neighbours we were, and loving friends
> We might have been."

In a nobler verse he bore his tribute to Burns's share in the renascence of British poetry. It was Burns

> "Whose light I hailed when first it shone,
> And showed my youth
> How Verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth."

Up Nithsdale, past Ellisland, the party went, still thinking of Burns. The place was alive with his genius. Wordsworth puts to Nature a question about Burns's poetry which we may perhaps put about his own. "Let us pause," he says—

> "And ask of Nature, from what cause
> And by what rules
> She trained her Burns to win applause
> That shames the Schools."

He thinks of him much as Shelley thought of Keats in *Adonais*, as "made one with Nature."

> "He rules 'mid winter snows, and when
> Bees fill their hives."

Then come stanzas of moral reflection and regret, much too instinct with charity to be didactic—

"Sweet Mercy ! to the gates of Heaven
This Minstrel lead, his sins forgiven ;
The rueful conflict, the heart riven
With vain endeavour,
And memory of Earth's bitter leaven,
Effaced for ever.

"But why to Him confine the prayer,
When kindred thoughts and yearnings bear
On the frail heart the purest share
With all that live ?—
The best of what we do and are,
Just God, forgive ! "

It was before Coleridge left the Wordsworths that they encountered at Inversnaid, on Loch Lomond, that Highland girl who lives for ever in one of Wordsworth's most exquisite poems—exquisite because the whole range of poetry hardly affords a stronger instance of nearly sexless lyrical rapture where sex-feeling might be strong. It was by Loch Katrine that the mysterious "Stepping Westward" question was put and answered. Then by Loch Awe and Kilchurn Castle, the "child of loud-throated war," with a glimpse of Mull ; across through Perthshire to Edinburgh ; then southward to the Tweed. They arrived at Edinburgh on September 15. Walter Scott was at this time an active and gifted young advocate of thirty-two, the Sheriff of Selkirkshire, with a great love of ballads, German and British, and a vast multifarious knowledge of the antiquities and poetic lore of the Border country, which he had embodied two years previously in the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. With his wife and children he lived at Lasswade, near Edinburgh ; and there, in that early home, Scott and Wordsworth had their first meeting. Their first night in Edinburgh the Wordsworths spent at the White Hart in the Grassmarket, "which we conjectured," wrote Dorothy, "would better suit us than one in a more fashionable part of the town." Friday, 16th, was a wet day, and, in a city in which so much depends on distant views, this was unlucky for the sightseers. "The Firth of Forth was entirely hidden from us, and all distant objects, and we strained our eyes till they ached, vainly trying

to pierce through the thick mist." Nevertheless, "Edinburgh far surpassed all expectation."

That evening they went to Rosslyn to sleep; and on the Saturday morning, fine after the rain, they walked through Hawthornden to Lasswade. The Wordsworths were early folk, like all tourists in new places; and when they knocked at Walter Scott's door, neither he nor his wife was up. They had to wait in a large sitting-room; but at last the Sheriff came in with his limp and his *burr* and his hearty manner—his "grave cordiality," as Wordsworth called it. The guests had breakfast with the Scotts, and stayed until two o'clock, when Scott accompanied them back to Rosslyn. We can fancy from what stores the Sheriff would pour forth his delightful talk, and how memorable he would make those hours. Wordsworth was struck, as in after years he always was, with Scott's modesty; his cheerfulness, his benevolence, his hopeful views of man and the world. And he was privileged to hear, that day, the first four cantos of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, which was not to be published for two years, "partly read and partly recited, sometimes in an enthusiastic style of chant." Wordsworth was "greatly delighted" by the "novelty of the manners, the clear picturesque descriptions, and the easy, glowing energy of much of the verse." Would that there had always been the same appreciative note in his criticism of Scott's poetry!

The Wordsworths were going south to see the Tweed and the storied places through which it flows; and Scott, too, was on the point of starting for the Jedburgh Assizes. They struck Tweed at Peebles, and there, on a Sunday morning, Wordsworth wrote the sonnet of rebuke to the "unworthy Lord" Douglas for felling the trees that clothed the nakedness of Neidpath Castle—a wrong

> "Which Nature scarcely seems to heed;
> For shelter'd places, bosoms, nooks, and bays,
> And the pure mountains, and the gentle Tweed,
> And the green silent pastures yet remain."

They slept at Clovenford that night, and made the memorable decision to leave Yarrow unvisited, though Dorothy keenly wished to see the haunted stream.

> "Then said my winsome Marrow,
> 'Whate'er betide we'll turn aside
> And see the Braes of Yarrow.'"

Her brother's exquisite, if fallacious, dialectic, carried the day.

"Let beeves and home-bred kine partake
The sweets of Burnmill Meadow,
The swan on still St. Mary's Lake
Float double, swan and shadow.
We will not see them, will not go
To-day nor yet to-morrow ;
Enough if in our hearts we know
There's such a place as Yarrow."

On Monday morning to Melrose ; and there, on their way to the Abbey after breakfast, they met Scott in the street, and he went with them. What an opportunity, and what a guide!—though the ruins were "flouted" by "gay beams," and not glimmering in moonshine.

"The pillar'd arches were over their head,
And beneath their feet were the bones of the dead."

All that day the two poets were together and even all the following night ; for they slept in the same room at the inn. Next day Scott went on to Jedburgh, and the Wordsworths followed the river to Dryburgh, where Scott's body was one day to be laid. They intended to go on to Kelso, but late September rains drove them to Jedburgh, where they were again with Scott. They lodged with that excellent and young-hearted "Matron of Jedborough and her Husband" who are immortal in Wordsworth's verse. It was the wife who, though over seventy, would not grow old ; the husband was a speechless wreck—

"With legs that move not, if they can,
And useless arms, a trunk of man,
He sits, and with a vacant eye ;
A sight to make a stranger sigh !
. . . . . .
The joyous Woman is the Mate
Of him in that forlorn estate !
. . . . . .
He is as mute as Jedborough Tower !
She jocund as it was of yore
With all its bravery on ; in times
When all alive with merry chimes,
Upon a sun-bright morn of May,
It roused the Vale to holiday."

The merry old dame is to Wordsworth as eloquent from the

heart of Nature, as the Highland Girl herself. Her's was no thoughtless gaiety born of inexperience of pain ; she had known suffering both of body and mind. When you talked to her, there were times when

> "Some inward trouble suddenly
> Broke from the Matron's strong black eye—
> A remnant of uneasy light,
> A flash of something over-bright!"

But it was for a moment only ; victorious and wholesome joy soon reasserted itself. The poet learned his lesson about the potentialities of old age.

> "I praise thee, Matron! and thy due
> Is praise, heroic praise, and true!
> With admiration I behold
> Thy gladness unsubdued and bold!
> Thy looks, thy gestures, all present
> The picture of a life well spent :
> This do I see ; and something more ;
> A strength unthought of heretofore!
> Delighted am I for thy sake ;
> And yet a higher joy partake :
> Our Human-nature throws away
> Its second twilight, and looks gay ;
> A land of promise and of pride
> Unfolding, wide as life is wide."

Those were pleasant days at Jedburgh ; the Sheriff would come to supper when the Court rose, and go on reciting the *Lay ;* or he would join the brother and sister in their rambles by the woody Jed, or knee-deep in the ferns of Ferniehurst, which reminded Dorothy of Alfoxden. Young Will Laidlaw, too, was there, "as shy," Dorothy found, "as any of our Grasmere lads." He had a farm in Yarrow, and a poet's soul, and was eager to see Wordsworth. He was to write "Lucy's Flittin'" and other sweet genuine Scottish vernacular lyrics ; to be Scott's land-steward and *amanuensis* at Abbotsford, and to try to help his helplessness at the last. "Ha! Willie Laidlaw!" the dying man collected himself to exclaim, when they set him down in the dining-room at Abbotsford after the sad time abroad and in London : "O man, how often have I thought of you!"

Scott accompanied the travellers in their car from Jedburgh

to Hawick, the "Jedborough Matron" supplying sandwiches and cheesecakes for the journey. Scott pointed out Ruberslaw and Minto Crags, and had some story about nearly every house they passed. This was the last day of his company; next morning they parted at Hawick, after a wistful look from the top of a hill toward Scott's and Dandie Dinmont's Liddesdale. The Scottish tour was over; two days later the Wordsworths were at Dove Cottage again with Mary and Joanna Hutchinson, and little Johnny asleep in a clothes-basket by the fire.

Here was the making of a mighty friendship! Writing to Scott a week or two later, Wordsworth used strong words about it. "My sister and I often talk of the happy days that we spent in your company. Such things do not occur often in life. If we live, we shall meet again. That is my consolation, when I think of these things. Scotland and England sound like division, do what we can; but we really are but neighbours, and if you were no further off, and in Yorkshire, we should think so. Farewell! God prosper you and all that belongs to you! Your sincere friend—for such I will call myself, though slow to use a word of such solemn meaning to any one."

Two years later, in 1805, Scott was in Lakeland, and went to see Wordsworth at Dove Cottage. Authentic memories of this visit are scanty: Mrs. Scott was with her husband; was there accommodation for the couple at the Town End cottage? Tradition asserts that Scott himself was an inmate; and that, finding his host's water-drinking *ménage* a little chilly, he went for a daily morning-refresher to the inn at Grasmere. Quite certain it is that on an August day Wordsworth, Scott, and Humphry Davy climbed Helvellyn together. They passed, as they mounted, the place where the body of a man had been found that year, watched, three months after death, by his terrier dog. The man was well known as a fisherman and lover of the hills. Both poets commemorated the incident, Scott in long lines of fluent amphibrachs; Wordsworth in one of his characteristic lyrical narratives called *Fidelity*. It was the dog's behaviour which moved the poets, working wholly without collusion. Wordsworth greatly admired the lines in which Scott addressed the faithful dumb watcher—

> "How long didst thou think that his silence was slumber?
> When the wind waved his garment, how oft didst thou start?"

Wordsworth himself—so he tells us—took the "diction" of his last beautiful stanza from peasant lips—

> "Yes, proof was plain that, since the day
> When this ill-fated Traveller died,
> The Dog had watched about the spot,
> Or by his master's side:
> *How nourished here through such long time*
> *He knows, who gave that love sublime;*
> *And gave that strength of feeling, great*
> *Above all human estimate!*"

Subsequent meetings, at the Lakes, in London, and at Coleorton, deepened the respect and affection between Wordsworth and Scott. Yet Scott looked askance at a good deal in Wordsworth's poetry; and Wordsworth allowed himself to wave aside the whole of Scott's in a very lofty manner. Scott's disapprobation was hinted with the infinite modesty and delicacy characteristic of the man. He pleaded for Wordsworth with Jeffrey, and "made him admire" this and that. But he had to admit that Wordsworth sometimes "got beyond him." Though he did not "know a man more to be venerated for uprightness of heart and loftiness of genius," he "differed from him in very many points of taste." "Why he will sometimes choose to crawl upon all-fours, when God has given him so noble a countenance to lift to heaven, I am as little able to account for, as for his quarrelling . . . with the wrinkles which time and meditation have stamped his brow withal." So Scott wrote when he was 49, and Wordsworth 50. Seven years later, Scott put down more subtle criticism in his Journal. He remarked that something in his own character reminded him of Wordsworth's *Matthew*. Then he turns aside to rebuke Jeffrey gently for his inappreciation of *Matthew*. Jeffrey "loves to see imagination best when it is bitted and managed, and ridden upon the *grand pas*. He does not make allowance for starts and sallies and bounds, when Pegasus is beautiful to behold, though sometimes perilous to his rider." This is exquisitely put; and the Wordsworthian simplicity, over against Jeffrey's common sense, could find no better apology. But then Scott has a word for Wordsworth in his turn, mixed with a thoughtful self-estimate. "Not that I think the amiable bard of Rydal shows judgment in choosing such subjects as the popular mind cannot sympathize in. It is unwise and unjust to

himself. I do not compare myself, in point of imagination, with Wordsworth—far from it; for his is naturally exquisite, and highly cultivated from constant exercise. But I can see as many castles in the clouds as any man, as many genii in the curling smoke of a steam-engine, as perfect a Persepolis in the embers of a sea-coal fire. My life has been spent in such day-dreams. But I cry no roast meat. There are times when a man should remember what Rousseau used to say, *Tais-toi, Jean Jacques, car on ne t'entend pas!*" In other words, it was excess, rather than defect, of imagination which Scott blamed in Wordsworth; and he blamed it more for the sake of the poet's popularity than for anything deeper.

Very different was Wordsworth's tone about the poetry of Scott. He seemed unable to recognize in it any nobility of Romanticism; or to hail it as a genuine agent in the restoration of the beautiful, as a renascence of wholesome wonder; as the homely harvest of a seeing eye and a feeling heart. He fixed his attention on the narrative flow, and thought of it as mere rhymed story-telling; he thought it superficial and external; it had for him none of the depth essential to his conception of the higher poetry. He blamed the carelessness of the style. A deeper objection gives us pause. Scott, he said, was not *true to Nature;* his descriptions were addressed to the ear, not to the mind. It is curious to contrast with this judgment that of Ruskin, who, when he wrote the third volume of *Modern Painters*, was no mean literary critic. In that volume Ruskin deliberately takes Scott, in his poetry, as the type of the truest modern feeling for landscape; and if one merely glances at the quotations by which he illustrates and supports his thesis, it is difficult to disbelieve in its soundness. For the descriptions, the renderings of landscape which Scott gives us in his poetry, are without the frigidity and conventionality, the polysyllabic pomposity which do something to spoil his descriptions in prose; in verse he attained to a rapidity which was not mere haste, but the unhesitating expression of full conviction; to a simplicity and brevity which were born of perfect sincerity, and which enabled him to minister of the beautiful to all who were worthy to receive it.

If this had been pointed out to Wordsworth, he could hardly have gainsaid it. But he would still have insisted that the

beauty given by Scott was for the ear, not for the mind. He probably never paused, as Ruskin did, over Scott's Nature-poetry; he read it or heard it, as part and parcel of a piece of mere story-telling; and his general sense of externality, of mere picturesqueness and scene-painting, remained as his total impression. In Wordsworth himself, Nature, in detail as in general, was too much the mere embodiment and vehicle of the Universe to be accepted as Scott—a true poet, but no philosopher—presented her. For Wordsworth, the truth of Nature, which, in his estimation, Scott failed to reach and convey, was indeed that which never entered into the circle of Scott's mind—her mystical personality, her sublime unity. All else was mere surface-work, mere entertainment. It was a hasty and unjust judgment, and it did both Scott and Wordsworth harm.

But Wordsworth, though he may have fallen short as Scott's reader, showed no shortcoming as his friend. In the radiance of that sweet personality, criticism was quickly lost in love; before the totality of that astonishing achievement, all men have to bow the knee. The fall of Scott, the collapse of his fortunes, the fatal breach in his health, the certainty of death on the mere confines of old age, gave deep pain to Wordsworth as it did to all who knew him, all to whom he was known. Early in 1830, when he was not yet 59, Scott had his first apoplectic stroke. Yet he went on bravely with his duties in the Court of Session, his *Demonology and Witchcraft*, and other literary labours. He would not look upon himself as fatally seized or threatened. In July he wrote to Wordsworth—whom he addressed "Dearest Wordsworth"—"Don't you remember something of a promise broken, and propose to repair it next year? I hope you mean to visit Abbotsford, and bring with you as many of your family as you possibly can. You will find me in my glory; . . . Mrs. Wordsworth and Miss Wordsworth will, I hope, think themselves at home, as well as my early acquaintance, Miss Dorothea." Wordsworth replied to "dear Sir Walter," and rebuked him gently for writing "Mount Rydal" instead of "Rydal Mount." The visit came off in September, 1831, just a year before Scott's death. Scott had been declining fast. He had to retire from the clerkship of the Court of Session; he had another stroke; his faculties were manifestly impaired. More and more he leant on Will Laidlaw and his ever-ready

SIR WALTER SCOTT

FROM UNFINISHED PORTRAIT BY SIR EDWIN LANDSEER IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

kindness; patiently he worked at *Count Robert of Paris*, *Castle Dangerous*, and *Tales of a Grandfather*. In the summer, Turner the painter was with him. It was resolved to try the effect of a voyage and winter abroad. Scott was to start on September 23, and on the 21st Wordsworth and Dora arrived at Abbotsford. Wordsworth would have gone earlier, but had been prevented from starting by a bad attack of inflammation of the eyes. However, Scott's preparations were made, and there was a pleasant little party at Abbotsford, with an air of leisurely hospitality. Though Lockhart reports that his wife had gone on to London the day before the Wordsworths came, Wordsworth himself speaks of her as at Abbotsford, and as "chanting old ballads to her harp." Major Scott was there, and his sister Anne; and there were other agreeable and amusing people. Wordsworth was shocked by the change in his old friend; but Scott did his best as the poet-host of a poet. An expedition was made to Newark Castle—Wordsworth's second visit to the Vale of Yarrow. Sir Walter was able to walk with something of the old vigour. Wordsworth commemorated the day in his *Yarrow Revisited*—verses which have none of the charm of the other poems inspired by the haunted stream. Yet there is fine homage to Scott in the assurance of welcome by Italy to the Minstrel of the Border—

> "For Thou, upon a hundred streams,
> By tales of love and sorrow,
> Of faithful love, undaunted truth,
> Hast shed the power of Yarrow;
> And streams, unknown, hills yet unseen,
> Wherever they invite Thee,
> At parent Nature's grateful call,
> With gladness must requite Thee."

As they returned to Abbotsford by the ford of the Tweed, Wordsworth saw a sad light, purple rather than golden, on the Eildon Hills. It seemed "fraught with omen"; and he put all the sadness of his heart into an irregular sonnet—

> "A trouble, not of clouds, or weeping rain,
> Nor of the setting sun's pathetic light
> Engendered, hangs o'er Eildon's triple height:
> Spirits of Power, assembled there, complain
> For kindred Power departing from their sight;

While Tweed, best pleased in chanting a blithe strain,
Saddens his voice again, and yet again.
Lift up your hearts, ye Mourners! for the might
Of the whole world's good wishes with him goes;
Blessings and prayers, in nobler retinue
Than sceptred king or laurelled conqueror knows
Follow this wondrous Potentate. Be true,
Ye winds of ocean and the midland sea,
Wafting your Charge to soft Parthenope!"

In Dora's album, on the morning before the Wordsworths left, Scott wrote verses, too imperfect to be transcribed here. Speaking of them to Dora, Scott said: "I should not have done anything of this kind but for your father's sake; they are probably the last verses I shall ever write." Then the poets had a long talk, in the course of which Scott spoke of the happiness, on the whole, of his life. To Wordsworth, wishing him health from his journey, Scott, with a sad smile, quoted from *Yarrow Unvisited*—

"When I am there, although 'tis fair,
'Twill be another Yarrow."

Then they parted; and next day Scott began his journey to Naples.

In 1837, Wordsworth in Italy sums up his feeling about Scott, in the long blank verse poem called *Musings near Aquapendente.* The sight of the Apennines characteristically sent his fancy wandering to his Lakeland, to Fairfield, and Seat Sandal and Helvellyn. And then his thoughts fell on Scott, and he remembered how Italy, with all her amplitude of beauty, had no cure for his sick body and mind. And he was moved to thanksgiving that he was still well enough, still free enough, to enjoy what had done nothing for his friend—

"That I—so near the term of human life
Appointed by man's common heritage,
Frail as the frailest one, withal (if that
Deserve a thought) but little known to fame—
Am free to rove where Nature's loveliest looks,
Art's noblest relics, history's rich bequests,
Failed to reanimate and but feebly cheered
The whole world's Darling—free to rove at will
O'er high and low, and if requiring rest,
Rest from enjoyment only."

In the *Extempore Effusion* of 1835 Wordsworth had remembered Scott. He thought of his visits to Yarrow—

> "When last along its banks I wandered,
> Through groves that had begun to shed
> Their golden leaves upon the pathways,
> My steps the Border-Minstrel led.
> "The mighty Minstrel breathes no longer,
> 'Mid mouldering ruins low he lies."

But the immediate inspiration of the poem was a less famous Scot than Sir Walter—less famous and yet as genuine—James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, the author of *Kilmeny* and *The Queen's Wake;* one of the expounders of the Romanticism of the Scottish border, whom British literature cannot quite afford to forget. Wordsworth met him during his first Scottish expedition in 1803, not long after Scott himself had come to know him. Hogg was a sheep-farmer rather than a shepherd proper; a rough, uncouth fellow, with a streak of most real genius. In Wordsworth's cold, uncompromising phrase, "he was undoubtedly a man of original genius, but of coarse manners, and low and offensive opinions." It was in Hogg's company that Wordsworth first saw Yarrow.

> "When first, descending from the moorland,
> I saw the Stream of Yarrow glide
> Along a bare and open valley,
> The Ettrick Shepherd was my guide."

Wordsworth had not enough humour, flexibility, breadth to touch things and persons Scottish with more than his fingertips. But with one of the most vigorous and impressive of the Scots of genius in those days, he was brought into close relations of more than one kind. John Wilson, the "Christopher North" of *Blackwood's Magazine*, is one of those who suffer the nemesis of too strong personality. A poet, a critic, an essayist, a humourist, a journalist, a professor of moral philosophy, he was interesting and creditable in each capacity, and yet he is hardly remembered in any. He is remembered chiefly by those survivors who can look back on the living man, with his splendid face and figure, in the Edinburgh streets, his masses of tawny hair, and the desultory rhapsodies in the college class-room, which did duty as lectures on moral philosophy. Yet he was a grand combination of brain

and muscle; a lover of the open air, of sport, of pedestrianism, "and yet a spirit still, and bright" with the love of all humane and generous and inspiring things that are born of men's minds. The son of a Paisley manufacturer, John Wilson was born in 1785, the year also of De Quincey's birth. Unlike most Scots of his rank in those days, Wilson went from Glasgow College to the University of Oxford, becoming a Commoner of Magdalen, in 1803. Before he left Glasgow there happened to him what happened to De Quincey almost simultaneously—he felt the impact of the early genius of Wordsworth. He read *Lyrical Ballads;* and so moved by them was he that in May, 1802, in his seventeenth year, he wrote a long letter about them to Wordsworth—a letter expressing the kind of passionate interest and admiration which De Quincey felt; a letter such as it does a youth good to write, and such as the greatest man may feel proud to get from the humblest of his disciples. "To receive a letter from you," Wilson wrote, "would afford me more happiness than any occurrence in this world, save the happiness of my friends." He felt that humanity in Wordsworth spoke straight to the humanity in himself. "You have seized upon those feelings that most deeply interest the heart." He realized the novelty, the orginality, of Wordsworth's treatment of Nature. The "disposition of the mind to assimilate the appearances of external nature to its own situation . . . you have employed with a most electrifying effect." With the ethical assurance of a well-disposed youth, Wilson dwelt on the "morality" of the new poetry; and informed Wordsworth that *Lyrical Ballads* was the book which he valued next to his Bible. Nor was the boy afraid of blaming, any more than of praising, his hero to his face. He considered that Wordsworth had fallen into an error, the effects of which were, however, "exceedingly trivial." In his desire to be truthful he had at times forgotten the paramount obligation on poetry to give "pleasure," *i.e.* to be always beautiful, or, at least, interesting. In *The Idiot Boy*, for example, Wilson thought that Wordsworth had failed to make Betty's maternal feeling interesting as such; and that, he considered, was the reason why he "never met one who did not rise rather displeased from the perusal" of the poem.

Wordsworth's reply was lengthy, and must have intoxicated Wilson. He discussed the influence of scenery on character,

and defended himself as to the unfortunate *Idiot Boy*, in words which are an instalment of his theory of poetry. Granting Wilson's contention that poetry must *please*, he asks: must please whom? And he answers: not this taste or that taste, but essential human nature. And then he asks: "Where are we to find the best measure of this? I answer, from within; by stripping our own hearts naked, and by looking out of ourselves to those men who lead the simplest lives, and most according to Nature; men who have never known false refinements, wayward and artificial desires, false criticisms, effeminate habits of thinking and feeling; or who, having known these things, have outgrown them." "People in our rank in life," Wordsworth proceeds, "are perpetually falling into one sad mistake, namely, that of supposing that Human Nature and the persons they associate with are one and the same thing." The fallacy imparts itself to literature; and a kind of conventionally polite standard is set up, below which poetic themes must not fall. This standard it was the mission of *Lyrical Ballads* to overthrow with the battle-cry of *nothing common! Idiot* is an ugly word; but the kind of human being designated by the word is one of God's creatures, and he and the ministries of service which surround him are for poetry as much as any other displays of human nature and human affection. "I have often applied to idiots," Wordsworth wrote, "in my own mind, that sublime expression of Scripture, that *their life is hidden with God*. . . . I have often looked upon the conduct of fathers and mothers of the lower classes of society toward idiots as a great triumph of the human heart. It is there that we see the strength, disinterestedness, and grandeur of love; nor have I ever been able to contemplate an object that calls out so many excellent and virtuous sentiments without finding it hallowed thereby, and having something in me which bears down before it, like a deluge, every feeble sensation of disgust and aversion." Wordsworth concluded his argument with a significant statement. "It is not enough for me as a Poet, to delineate merely such feelings as all men *do* sympathize with; but it is also highly desirable to add to these others, such as all men *may* sympathize with, and such as there is reason to believe they would be better and more moral beings if they did sympathize."

We know not how Wilson replied to this letter: perhaps

he only hugged it to his heart. He might have replied that Wordsworth had hardly met his chief difficulty, namely, that the affection of Betty Foy was not, in *the poet's presentation of it*, interesting enough for poetry. It may be allowed to the spectator of this argumentative encounter to remark that neither of the disputants quite understood the real claim of *The Idiot Boy* to poetic rank—its possession of humour. With its delicate union of humour and tenderness, and its delightful background of moonlit landscape, it was and is a true poem, worth pages of the sentimental melody which Wilson was afterwards to pour forth. Neither Wordsworth nor Wilson could understand this; and so their doughty strokes did little more than beat the air.

In 1807, when he was twenty-two, and had just finished a brilliant Oxford career, Wilson straightway made himself a Laker, by taking a cottage on the woody slopes that bound Windermere on the east. Henceforth he was "Mr. Wilson of Elleray," enjoying, like De Quincey, the proximity of the poets of Grasmere and Keswick, and bent on spending ample means in a life of poetry and sport and congenial fellowship. He set about building a larger house, and making acquaintance in all directions. He now got to know Wordsworth for the first time. In the winter of 1808–9, the winter of *The Friend* and the *Convention of Cintra* pamphlet, the smoky winter at Allan Bank, Wilson first saw De Quincey, his contemporary at Oxford, his one companion in true Wordsworthian insight. De Quincey and Coleridge were both at Allan Bank. "One room on the ground-floor"—so De Quincey wrote—"designed for a breakfasting-room . . . was then occupied by Mr. Coleridge as a study. On this particular day, the sun having only just set, it naturally happened that Mr. Coleridge—whose nightly vigils were long—had not yet come down to breakfast; meantime, and until the epoch of the Coleridgian breakfast should arrive, his study was lawfully disposable to profaner uses. Here, therefore, it was, that, opening the door hastily in quest of a book, I found seated, and in earnest conversation, two gentlemen; one of them my host, Mr. Wordsworth, at that time about thirty-seven or thirty-eight years old; the other was a younger man by good sixteen or seventeen years, in a sailor's dress, manifestly in robust health, *fervidus juventa*,

PROFESSOR JOHN WILSON
("CHRISTOPHER NORTH")

and wearing upon his countenance a powerful expression of ardour and animated intelligence, mixed with much good nature. '*Mr. Wilson of Elleray*'—delivered as the formula of introduction, in the deep tones of Mr. Wordsworth—at once banished the momentary surprise I felt on finding an unknown stranger where I had expected nobody, and substituted a surprise of another kind. I now well understood who it was that I saw." And De Quincey goes on describing the brilliant young man in his careful copious way. "A tall man about six feet high . . . built with tolerable appearance of strength . . . but wearing, for the predominant character of his person, lightness and agility;—he seemed framed with an express view to gymnastical exercises of every sort." De Quincey could not call him handsome. His complexion was too florid; hair of a hue quite unsuited to that complexion; eyes not good, "having no apparent depth, but seeming mere surfaces"; nothing fine, in short, except a Ciceronian mouth and chin. Wilson's manner and talk were more arresting than his appearance; the things which chiefly struck De Quincey were "the humility and gravity with which he spoke of himself; his large expansion of heart, and a certain air of noble frankness which overspread everything he said; he seemed to have an intense enjoyment of life; indeed, being young, rich, healthy, and full of intellectual activity, it could not be very wonderful that he should feel happy and pleased with himself and others; but it was somewhat unusual to find that so rare an assemblage of endowments had communicated no tinge of arrogance to his manner, or at all disturbed the general temperance of his mind."

The presence of such a man in those solitudes, and the sumptuous, sociable life which he lived in the neighbourhood, did something to enrich Wordsworth's experience. Wordsworth and Wilson made a more satisfactory pair of friends than Wordsworth and De Quincey. Like De Quincey, Wilson loved to ramble about by night; but his days were filled with more genial companionships than the solitude-loving opium-eater could or would command. Wilson made poetry in his nocturnal walks; he cultivated Wordsworthian moods and even Wordsworthian expressions, here and there in a much more full-blooded style than Wordsworth's—

"Beneath the full-orb'd moon, that bathed in light
The mellow'd verdure of Helvellyn's steep,
My spirit teeming with creations bright,
I walked like one who wanders in his sleep!
. . . . . .
Through the hush'd air awoke mysterious awe;
God cheer'd my loneliness with *holy mirth;*
And in this blended mood I clearly saw
The moving spirit that pervades the earth."

Wilson gave Wordsworth a very complete sympathy. In a fragment of prose-poetry, he commemorates, tenderly and lovingly, the parting of Wordsworth and his sailor-brother, which had made a great impression on his mind. "I one sweet summer day went along with him and heard the melancholy tale. Then, whoever gave to that sublime solitude muse with holy feelings, and with the wildness of nature join human sympathies."

The first phase of Wilson's Windermere life, with its enthusiasms of action and feeling, did not last very long. Wilson found a wife at Ambleside, and condensed his poetic efforts in one long, fluent, picturesque poem, *The Isle of Palms.* Its fluency and picturesqueness, rather than inwardness and imagination, justified Scott in speaking of it as "something in the style of Southey." Scott welcomed Wilson as an author, and characterized him well as an "excellent, warm-hearted, and enthusiastic young man; something too much, perhaps, of the latter quantity, places him amongst the list of originals." *The Isle of Palms* appeared in 1812, and was well received. Another volume, containing a drama, *The City of the Plague*, and other poems, came out in 1816; but before its publication, the prosperity of the Elleray life was wrecked, and Wilson entered on a new phase of activity. His independent income was lost; he had to work for his bread; and he went to Edinburgh to prepare for the Scottish Bar, and to enter, in a year or two, on his famous connection with *Blackwood*, and his best-known work as a writer of prose. He did not give up Elleray, though henceforward it was a haunt of his leisure, rather than a permanent home.

1817 was an important year in British literary annals. The critical renascence and the exciting conditions of public affairs had given birth to the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews*, of

which the former was Whig and the latter chiefly Tory. Literature, as such, has nothing to do with party-politics; but in those days partisanship was allowed to take possession of literature and falsify its criticism. Nowhere was partisanship keener, nowhere was intelligence more vigorous, than in Edinburgh. The city teemed with able young men; and William Blackwood the bookseller was as able and astute as any of them. The Whig *Edinburgh*, with Jeffrey as its oracle, had an unreasonable and undesirable monopoly: John Murray's *Quarterly* was a London affair. There was room, nay, there was a crying need, for a monthly Edinburgh magazine, of Tory principles and with a mellower tone than Jeffrey and his co-adjutors could command. In October, 1817, after one false start under another name, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* began to appear; and Wilson found in it his chief outlet henceforward. Yet it was some time before he could accommodate himself to it, or, indeed, before it learned its own proper *rôle* in the world of letters. In its first inception, *Blackwood* was very republican in constitution, Blackwood himself being its sole editor; and it was written in too partisan, personal, and satirical a view to be suited either to Wilson's gracious and generous temper, or to the healing and edifying work it was destined to do in the 'twenties and 'thirties. The *Blackwood* which tried to scorch Coleridge and put an extinguisher on Keats was not the *Blackwood* of "Christopher North." *Blackwood* was going to be something very different from the mere organ of Scottish Toryism, something much better than an opponent of the *Edinburgh*, a rival of the *Quarterly*. Its real mission, not in Scotland only, but in Britain, was to be the medium of that higher lighter literature—the literature of fiction, of sympathetic criticism, of humour, of feeling for landscape and pastoral life—which was born afresh at the opening of the nineteenth century.

The *Blackwood* which was all this was the *Blackwood* which gave itself up to "Christopher North." He, laying poetry aside, became its brain, its life, its soul. In 1820 Wilson was made Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, and Professor he remained for more than thirty years. But he found time simultaneously to pour himself out in *Blackwood*, to be its best critic, its most unflagging humourist, its most delightful essayist. Of Wilson's humour the dialogues—not all written

by Christopher—called *Noctes Ambrosianæ* are the most substantial monument. If the *Noctes* repel by an occasional coarseness, or by a too continuous gush of the rhetorical sentimentalism which was Wilson's bane, they are an invaluable record of an interesting phase of Scottish character and letters; they show us, better than anything else, not only the better and more intellectual side of Scottish convivialism in the reign of George IV., but that Scoto-English literary *rapprochement*, which was shown also by the popularity of Scott on both sides of the Border; by De Quincey's complete domestication in Edinburgh; by the Oxford associations of John Gibson Lockhart; and, last but not least, by Wilson's own double personality as at once a Laker and a Scot of Scots. No literary shortcomings can ever rob the *Noctes* of this high value.

And then the *Recreations of Christopher North! Christopher at the Lakes, Christopher at Colonsay, Anglimania;* what delightful desultoriness; what lyrical egoism; what wholesome Nature-worship, wholesome sociability! For the periodical essay of this kind, John Wilson, on his much lower plane, really did nearly as much as Charles Lamb.

How Christopher North handled Wordsworth in *Blackwood*—and he had much to do with him—we shall see in the last chapter. Personal intercourse there was not much between the two men after the change in Wilson's fortunes in 1815. Wilson's visits to Elleray were infrequent and brief, and generally in summer, when the Professor was the centre of a gay party, not quite suited to Wordsworth's idiosyncrasy.

In the summer of 1825 there were specially great doings. Sir Walter Scott, with his daughter Anne and Lockhart, was in Ireland that summer; and, on their way back, they passed northward by Wales and the Lakes. Of course they found their way to Elleray, and stayed three days with the Wilsons. Nor was this all. At Storrs, further down the lake, lived a certain Colonel Bolton, with whom George Canning was staying. Canning and Scott were great friends; and Wordsworth and Southey greatly admired the Tory statesman, with his love of national independence abroad, and his unflinching resistance to Parliamentary reform at home. Therefore there were great comings and goings between Storrs, Elleray, Rydal, and Greta Hall; and the eastern shore of Windermere was brilliant in

August, 1825. Canning was greatly appreciative of Wilson, whom he called "Lord High Admiral of the Lakes." Wilson's favourite form of social celebration was the organizing a regatta on the lake; and he outdid himself on this occasion. The house-parties at Storrs and Elleray met day after day; Wordsworth and Southey were as merry as everybody else; there were riding-parties in the woods in the mornings; boatings on the moonlit lake in the evenings; and then the climax—the unparalleled regatta. "Perhaps," Lockhart narrated, "there were not fewer than fifty barges following in the Professor's radiant procession when it paused at the Point of Storrs to admit into the place of honour the vessel that carried kind and happy Mr. Bolton and his guest. The three Bards of the Lakes led the cheers that hailed Scott and Canning; and the music and sunshine, flags, streamers, and gay dresses, the merry hum of voices, and the rapid splashing of innumerable oars, made up a dazzling mixture of sensations, as the flotilla wound its way among richly-foliaged islands, and along bays and promontories peopled with enthusiastic spectators."

But, though Elleray and Wordsworth occasionally saw Wilson, he was now and henceforward essentially the Edinburgh man, the mainstay of *Blackwood*, the beloved *paterfamilias* and Professor. Between them, his daughter and his pupils have left a delightful picture of the splendid giant when his yellow hair was growing grey; of his loving heart, his overflowing energy, his bewildered and bewildering absence of mind. We see him in his class-room with his copious rhetorical lectures written on backs of old letters or any other handy scraps of paper; his blue eyes flashing with elevated feeling; or his powerful frame shaken with emotion under some spasm of pathetic reminiscence or tragic contrast. We see him in his home, tender with his wife, playful with his children and grandchildren; the friend of every gentle and oppressed dumb creature. He outlived Wordsworth four years; working on manfully until the arresting touch of paralysis was laid upon him. When he passed away, in the spring of 1854, a large and light-bearing spirit was lost to the world.

CHAPTER XII

FELLOW-WORKERS IN ROMANTICISM

THE question as to Wordsworth's affinities with contemporary poets who have become immortal, is not to be solved by collecting his opinions of them, or theirs of him. Wordsworth's own criticism was never enthusiastic, and often, when he was dealing with individuals, it was ill-informed, prejudiced, and conventional. Moreover, great as was his achievement in poetic reform, splendidly as he showed how imagination at its highest deals with poetic material, he was often imperfectly aware of the whereabouts of his own successes; and his theory of imagination, which he was eager to put in logical form, is, when one tries to grasp it, a mere vanishing cloud. There was a strong tendency, even among those who were hardly "Lakists," to accept the Lakist theory and to cut Wordsworth, or Wordsworth and Coleridge, off from the poetic movement of their age. (Compare C. Lamb's attitude to Byron, and the all but ignoring of Shelley and Keats.)

The other side of the account, no doubt, is more satisfactory. What Wordsworth said or wrote of the poetry of Coleridge, or Scott, or Keats, or Shelley, or Byron, might be blotted out with hardly a grain of appreciable loss. On the other hand, if we forget Byron's vulgar scorn, there is sufficient evidence that the poets we have named, although not Wordsworth's partisans, gave him the kind of consideration and veneration, the kind of admiring homage which the world now gives him without dissent. Yet, even so, their criticism was contemporary; and its historical interest is not equalled by its absolute value. Their consciousness, however, that Wordsworth, with whatever differences, was in poetry a fellow-worker, makes a better starting-point than Wordsworth's own self-consciousness, or the partisanship which flattered it. We can see what Wordsworth

himself failed to see, that the other great poets of the Romantic Revival were in Wordsworth's circle: we only want to assure ourselves as to their claims and qualifications to stand there.

The Romantic Revival as a whole may be treated from many points of view. Perhaps one of the most practically useful approaches to it is made by considering its relation to Elizabethanism on the one hand, and to the dominant genius of the eighteenth century on the other. For, if we exclude Chaucer, as being outside our immediate question, and if we make the Elizabethan age and the eighteenth century large enough to include all the epoch-making English poetry between the *Shepheardе's Calendar* and *Lyrical Ballads*, we shall prepare ourselves to realize what was done, and done in concert, for English poetry between 1798 and 1825. The change from where poetry stood under Dryden and Pope to where it stood under, say, Wordsworth and Shelley, is so startling that it cannot be ignored, and cannot easily be misunderstood. Had Dryden been what Chaucer has been called, the "father of English poetry," one might say with some plausibility that such poetry as he founded was hardly poetry at all, and that it was left for the poets of the Romantic Revival to distinguish the true from the nominal, the real from the official. With the poetry of Dryden and Pope, even with the poetry of Gray, the poetry of the first quarter of the nineteenth century has the slenderest affinities. Milton stands in a class by himself. Touching Dryden on the one hand, and easily reaching back into the Elizabethan age on the other, he has but slender relationship to either. Essentially, what the Elizabethans did for English poetry was to make it human, and to make it the vehicle of beauty. And they did it by inventing and perfecting the drama on the one hand, and the lyrical strain on the other. Spenser's great allegory is, like *Paradise Lost*, to some extent solitary: it is a poem of many aspects, partly didactic, partly Protestant, partly courtly, partly conventional-chivalric. It is the constant beauty and unfailingly sweet phraseology of the *Faerie Queene* which secure its immortality. Much more typical is the *Epithalamium*, with its whole-hearted exposition of love, its gorgeous imagery, its incomparable lyrical rapture. Here, and in Shakespeare, we have the best that Elizabeth's age could do for poetry.

It was much indeed; and yet it left much to be done, much towards which the eighteenth century accomplished nothing. Poetry was not yet "meditative"; it was not yet introspective; it was hardly yet ideal or universal. The glory of Elizabethanism was its actuality, its satisfaction with its own surroundings, its own successful, strong-pulsed life. England, the Queen, Protestantism, El Dorado—these were universals and ideals enough; and if at any point they failed, there was the past to supplement them, the past of Greece, the past of Rome. With such a world to be realized, to be held, by such intelligence, there was no room for philosophy, no temptation to sentimentalism: here was no place for bitter indignation; for eager longing, for scornful satire; no call to be over-stimulated by cosmopolitan ideals, or to reconstruct ultimate conceptions of God and man. Action and passion, the glory of the established order, so new and yet so strong; the romance of discovery, added to the immortal romance of love; were these things not the stuff of centuries of poetry?

But things move quickly; and the Elizabethan freshness died away. Puritanism came, suggesting a new synthesis of things; poetry, in spite of Milton, was forced into opposition; it became the minister of intelligence rather than of feeling, of criticism rather than of enjoyment; it lost its hold on beauty. Too much was sacrificed to form; too little play was allowed to individuality. Then, at last, individuality turned scornfully round on tradition. The world seemed cumbered with outworn tyrannies; and, except where there was revolution, the imagination took refuge in ideals, ideals of the past, ideals of the future. The sense of the beautiful reawoke, and insisted on expressing itself anew. Nature, which the Elizabethan had cared for after his fashion as a haunt of fairies or a background for human life, came to be loved for its own sake and for its infinite spiritual significance, as well as its infinite beauty and charm. Foreign landscape began to make appeal to the most insular of English patriots. Individual feeling, even the "pageant of bleeding hearts," was precious now as poetry. The relations of God and the world called out for poetic restatement.

In all these things we recognize the work of the Romantic Revival as a whole. How is the responsibility for it to be distributed?

Take the two most apparently antithetic of all the great poets of the age—Wordsworth and Byron. Nothing would have surprised and shocked Wordsworth more than to have been regarded as in any sense a co-operator with Byron. "Power," power prostituted for the most part to the basest uses, was all that that pure and stern mind would have allowed to the poet of *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*. And we know that Byron, in his estimate of Wordsworth, never got much beyond contempt superinduced upon conventionalism. Yet how does the matter stand? Byron had Popian sympathies and did Popian work; yet Byron was as much an innovator on the poetic tradition as Wordsworth. His satire may be his best work; but *Childe Harold* lives and will live; the charm of the oriental tales will never wholly disappear; and Byron, after his fashion, was a lyrist, and not a wholly insincere one. His ways, indeed, lay far apart from Wordsworth's; yet, in one respect at least, he did Wordsworth's work. If Mrs. Radcliffe can be credited, as assuredly she can, with having rediscovered the beauty of Nature, so still more can Byron. If Wordsworth sang the praise of mountains and lakes in England, so, and with an equal enthusiasm, did Byron of mountains and lakes in Switzerland and Greece. Byron's sunset at Venice is as carefully observed, and treated with as much sense of the beautiful, as Wordsworth's green linnet or daisy. Moreover, no English poet before Byron would or could have written such a passage. It is as much a "romantic revival" as *The Ancient Mariner;* nay, it is not a revival, it is an origination.

Because Byron was a sentimentalist, a rhetorician, an egotist it is the shallowest criticism to deny him true and wonderful poetic inspiration. And though he was much of a *poseur*, a good deal of his poetry represented as genuine a return to Nature as Wordsworth's. His appropriation of European landscape for poetry, his invention of a poetry of travel, was an achievement closely akin to Wordsworth's invention of a new pastoralism. Both achievements were wholly free from imitativeness; in both there was a return to the *facts* of Nature from the ideal landscape of Spenser and Milton; both record impressions absolutely at first hand. Wordsworth maintained that Byron, when his poetry was nearest being good, plagiarized from him; and it is much the fashion to find Wordsworthian influence in the third and

fourth cantos of *Childe Harold.* We may decline to take up the question of the plagiarism. As for influence, it is evident that the purest originality has parentage and ancestry; and that influence does not necessarily turn first-hand into second-hand work.

Another point of kinship between the two dissimilar poets is their common passion for liberty. Here there is essential unity with superficial diversity. Byron was nearly a generation younger than Wordsworth; and while the elderly senior poet was reposing in the Conservative atmosphere of Lord Liverpool's *régime,* the young Byron was plunging and kicking in the somewhat aimless energies of the new Radicalism. But these things do not count. In the politics of their poetry both men were pledged—so to put it—to tyrannicide, to the cause of nations against their oppressors. As Wordsworth's heart leaped for Switzerland and Venice and Spain, so did Byron's for Greece. And, long before the age at which Wordsworth became a timid Conservative, Byron, in a fantasy of self-devotion, had given his life for the kind of liberty which Wordsworth had most at heart.

Once more, if Byron is sometimes wearisome with his guide-book-like snippets of reminiscence, his sequences of appropriate poetical reflection, is not Wordsworth sometimes the same? What about *Ecclesiastical Sonnets;* what about those super-abundant "Memorials" of tours in Scotland, tours on the Continent? To pause, with one's "foot upon a nation's dust," to "start a ghost at every corner," is of the essence of Romanticism.

Wordsworth and Byron, then, were not wholly antithetic; still less so were Wordsworth and Shelley. Wordsworth, for his part, mostly ignored Shelley, though he knew something of his poetry, and thought him a great *artist,* a master of style. Shelley thought of Wordsworth much as "the lost leader;" but he thought of him, at least early in his life, as an excellent poet. To Wordsworth, Shelley, like Byron, was a moral suspect, a teacher of dangerous doctrines, made all the more seductively dangerous by the fineness of the art by which they were conveyed. In Wordsworth's nature there were recurrent strata of commonplace; and these were often tapped in the course of his critical operations, especially upon contemporaries. One of the most

characteristic of these strata was the conviction that poetry ought to be, and is, didactic in the sense in which teaching and preaching are; and the allied conviction, that a man's poetry is the mere transcript of his opinions. It is perhaps impossible to conceive Wordsworth reading through *Prometheus Unbound* with the care which he demanded from readers of *The Excursion;* but it is certain that, if he had done so, he would have regarded it as spreading atheism and rebellion clad in rainbows. If he had read *The Cenci*, he (who was capable of calling Coleridge's *Love* sensual and *Christabel* indelicate) would have said, "See what comes of loose notions about marriage!" As regarded his own poetry, Wordsworth of course transcended this view of things. There would have been a pretty to-do if anybody had called the *Tintern Abbey* lines pantheistic, or had tried to connect them with their author's infrequent church-going in those days. Wordsworth would have replied, and replied quite properly, that, however necessary dogma may be in religion, it is not required at all in poetry; and that, if a poet uses *quasi*-religious phraseology, he does so with at least a philosopher's or scientist's licence. And as to the church-going, he would have said to the critic *quâ* critic, "What business is that of yours?"

The question as to the didactic motive and practical moral effect of any given poetry, and the question whether any supposed taint of life or opinion in a poet communicates itself to his writings, are among the most delicate problems in literary criticism. If Wordsworth failed to see that the problem is solved very differently in the cases of Byron and Shelley, we need not be very hard on him. Nor does it matter if he failed to recognize the essential kinship between his own work and Shelley's. For us who read both poets with inward as well as outward eyes, the kinship is plain enough.

The poets had very similar experiences in the education of feeling, that education which gives a permanent direction to poetic effort. Shelley has not left so much express autobiography as Wordsworth; but he has left enough, direct and indirect, to show how he was led to his view of the poetry of things. If we do not learn as much from *Alastor* and the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* as from *The Prelude* and the *Tintern Abbey* lines, we learn enough to convince us that both poets felt much the same need, and supplied it in much the same way. *Alastor*,

for all its beauty and characteristic charm, is a dreary and morbid poem, and Wordsworth would doubtless have dismissed it as such, horrified at the suggestion that it had any affinity with himself. The hero of *Alastor* is not even Shelley as he was; he is Shelley as he might have been, as he was just saved from being. Yet Alastor is, *mutatis mutandis*, essentially what Wordsworth was at that stage in the "growth of a poet's mind" before "love of Nature" had begun to "lead to love of man"; before the "still, sad music of humanity" had entered to harmonize with the tones of early rapture. It is very likely that Shelley, who was much under Wordsworth's influence in those days, borrowed from Wordsworth the phrase "natural piety," which occurs in the third line of *Alastor;* and, at any rate, Shelley's hero, at the outset, is a recognizably Wordsworthian figure. Wordsworth, indeed, was never morbid: he never, so far as we know, made his bed "in charnels and on coffins," in the hope of inducing some communicative ghost to make known to him the secret of things. But, on the whole, the analysis of Alastor's early "natural piety" might be that of Wordsworth's—

> "If dewy morn, and odorous noon, and even,
> With sunset and its gorgeous ministers,
> And solemn midnight's tingling silentness;
> If autumn's hollow sighs in the sere wood,
> And winter robing with pure snow and crowns
> Of starry ice the gray grass and bare boughs;
> . . . . . .
> If no bright bird, insect, or gentle beast
> I consciously have injured, but still loved
> And cherished these my kindred."

Alastor is a purely abstract figure; the mere shadow of a shade. The feverish thirst of his egoism drives him into experiences of which there is no counterpart in Wordsworth's biography or imagination. But, like Paracelsus, like Aprile, or, for that matter, like Faust, Alastor is the victim of a false view of the universe, a wilful taking of the part for the whole, the wilful rejection of the divine obligations of fellowship. His ideal is never realized, because he will have nothing to do with its appointed realization in the ministries of social life. And the

knowledge of this was a critical lesson of Wordsworth's education as a poet. Shelley might have taken as the motto of his poem Wordsworth's verses on Peel Castle—

> "Farewell, farewell the heart that lives alone,
> Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind!
> Such happiness, wherever it be known,
> Is to be pitied; for 'tis surely blind.
>
> "But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
> And frequent sights of what is to be borne!
> Such sights, or worse, as are before me here,—
> Not without hope we suffer and we mourn."

In the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* Shelley speaks of himself without mystification or disguise. But he first speaks of Beauty in the most universal conception of it, and on its intellectual rather than its sensuous side, in language which inevitably reminds us of Wordsworth. For what is Wordsworth's most general and abstract conception of Beauty?

> "Beauty—a living Presence of the earth,
> Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
> Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed
> From earth's materials—waits upon my steps;
> Pitches her tents before me as I move,
> An hourly neighbour; Paradise, and groves
> Elysian, Fortunate Fields—like those of old
> Sought in the Atlantic Main—why should they be
> A history only of departed things,
> Or a mere fiction of what never was?
> For the discerning intellect of Man,
> When wedded to this goodly universe
> In love and holy passion, shall find these
> A simple produce of the common day."

In Shelley's *Hymn* Wordsworth's "cheerful faith" is wanting. Beauty is a compensation for the blank and chill negation of things; it is not their efflorescence and fruition. And even Beauty, without which we could not live, has the fugitiveness of the rainbow, not the steadfastness of the day and night.

> "Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate
> With thine own tears all thou dost shine upon
> Of human thought or form,—where art thou gone?

Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,
This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?
Ask why the sunlight not for ever
Weaves rainbows o'er yon mountain river,
Why aught should fail and fade that once is shown,
Why fear and dream and death and birth
Cast on the daylight of this earth
Such gloom—why man has such a scope
For love and hate, despondency and hope?

"No voice from some sublimer world hath ever
To sage or poet these responses given—
Therefore the names of Demon, Ghost, and Heaven
Remain the records of their vain endeavour,
Frail spells—whose uttered charm might not avail to sever,
From all we hear and all we see,
Doubt, chance, and mutability.
Thy light alone—like mist o'er mountains driven,
Or music by the night wind sent
Thro' strings of some still instrument,
Or moonlight on a midnight stream,
Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream."

The melancholy, the agnosticism of all this are, of course, quite foreign to Wordsworth; but not so, surely, is the idea which underlies the lines that follow—

"Man were immortal and omnipotent
Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,
Keep with thy glorious train, firm state within his heart.
Thou messenger of sympathies
That wax and wane in lovers' eyes—
Thou—that to human thought art nourishment,
Like darkness to a dying flame!"

Shelley's account of the development and purification of his sense of the unseen is very like Wordsworth's.

"While yet a boy," he tells us, "I sought for ghosts"; but he neither heard nor saw them. Then suddenly there was revealed to him the more excellent way, and he saw Beauty—

"When musing deeply on the lot
Of life, at the sweet time when winds are wooing
All vital things that wake to bring
News of birds and blossoming—
Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!"

And we remember Wordsworth at Hawkshead, first terrified by the spirituality of Nature, then, in later days—

> "Only then
> Contented, when with bliss ineffable
> I felt the sentiment of Being spread
> O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still;
> . . . . . .
> O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,
> Or beats the gladsome air . . .
> One song they sang, and it was audible."

The last stanza of Shelley's *Hymn* is closely Wordsworthian, with an echo even of the Wordsworthian phraseology—

> "The day becomes more solemn and serene
> When noon is past—there is a harmony
> In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,
> Which thro' the summer is not heard or seen,
> As if it could not be, as if it had not been!
> Thus let thy power, which like the truth
> Of Nature on my passive youth
> Descended, to my onward life supply
> Its calm—to one who worships thee,
> Whom, Spirit fair, thy spells did bind
> To fear himself, and love all human kind."

We are reminded, not only of the conclusion of Wordsworth's *Immortality* Ode, but of the moral of those very early lines *Left on a Seat in a Yew Tree*, which haunted Charles Lamb after his visit to Nether Stowey—

> "True dignity abides with him alone
> Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
> Can still suspect, and still revere himself,
> In lowliness of heart."

Shelley speaks of his "passive youth;" but that is not the impression left on us by his account of the attitude of young poets towards the secrets of things. Wordsworth might have more fittingly called his youth passive in this sense: he was the healthy, natural boy, whom Nature sought with her revelations,

> "More like a man
> Flying from something that he dreads, than one
> Who sought the thing he loved."

Shelley, on the other hand, pursues Nature with shrill eager

insistence ; follows her over the world and into every region of thought and feeling ; and will have her secret or die. That is the moral of Alastor's feverish quest and untimely end.

But there were deeper affinities between Wordsworth and Shelley than any similarities of poetic training and tendency. They were alike as poets, in realizing, conceiving, the Universe ; and realizing it as spiritual and *quasi*-personal. This community brings them closely into line as fellow-workers in the Romanticism of the nineteenth century. They two, indeed, share, and share almost equally, the honour of giving to British literature a truly philosophical poetry, of conceiving for poetry the ideality and unity of the world, with the conviction of the theologian or the constructor of a philosophy. What is Wordsworth at his deepest and loveliest ?

> " I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thought ; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;
> A motion and a spirit that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought
> And rolls through all things."

These lines may be said to be Wordsworth's text ; they are the key to all his poetry. And an almost equal importance belongs to the lines from Shelley's *Adonais*, in which the phrases march with something of the finality of the clauses of a creed—

> " That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
> That Beauty in which all things work and move.
> That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
> Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
> Which through the web of being blindly wove
> By man and beast and earth and air and sea
> Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
> The fire for which all thirst ; now beams on me."

Every reader of both poets must recognize how representative both those passages are ; how the conviction of all things as combined in, and informed by, a unity, to which it is not mere fancy to attribute thought and love, explained, for Shelley and Wordsworth alike, both the beauty of Nature and the

destiny of Man. Wordsworth read the riddle as a realist, Shelley as an idealist; but both were engaged on the same riddle, both found the same solution. Wordsworth attained his universal through the humble folk and temperate beauties among which he lived; Shelley through courageous and boundless idealization, a new mythology, almost new heavens and a new earth. But both (religion and theology apart) were, without knowing it, worshippers in the same temple, heralds of the same hope.

Also they were alike in their essential devotion to human interests in their poetry. It needs no exhaustive knowledge of Wordsworth to prove that mountains and lakes, cuckoos and daisies, were not his real themes, but Man, and his "unconquerable mind"; Man, Nature's child and spoiler; whom Nature can punish or heal, but never rob of his lordship. Wordsworth went to school to Socialism and Revolution; and what he learned in France determined his bent towards the poetry of fellowship for ever, made certain his farewell to "the heart that lives alone." Nature was but the second person of the trinity on which he mused in his solitude; the other two persons were Man and Human Life. Let us not be deceived as to Wordsworth's humanity by his comparative indifference to the interest of sex, and by the hodden gray and slow rustic movements of so many of his characters. No one needs to be reminded of the *Sonnets Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty*, and the passion with which they throb. But one might be tranced into ignoring the depths of tragedy and pathos, and of every kind of human interest hidden in so many homely-sounding little poems, in *Lucy Gray*, in the *Matthew* group, in *Michael*, in *The Excursion*—indeed, where not?—unless one kept in mind that the high argument was not scenery, not landscape, but—

> "How exquisitely the individual mind
> (And the progressive powers perhaps no less
> Of the whole species) to the external world
> Is fitted:—and how exquisitely too
> (Theme this but little heard of among men)
> The external world is fitted to the mind."

If the case was so with Wordsworth, it was equally so with Shelley. Matthew Arnold never made a stranger critical lapse

than when he dismissed Shelley as a poet of clouds and sunsets, except when he proclaimed his failure as an interpreter of Nature. We need not ransack Shelley's biography in order to find evidence of his love of Man; it is the pulse and nerve of his poetry. We have just reminded ourselves of the moral of *Alastor;* we have just seen the poet's commerce with Beauty issue in a kind of summary of individual and social perfection—

"To fear himself, and love all human kind."

The essential, central Shelley is not in lovely bye-play like *The Cloud* and *The Sensitive Plant,* nor even in mystical invention like *The Witch of Atlas.* It is in *The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound, The Cenci, Hellas*—works instinct with sociality, with morality. Even poems primarily and ostensibly of Nature, even the *Skylark* and the *Ode to the West Wind,* take all their deepest meaning from the human problem and struggle, over against which Nature is set.

"We look before and after
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

"Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy!"

Finally, if both Wordsworth and Shelley were poets of Man, and especially of social Man, and such serious philosophic poets of Man as British literature had hardly known before, they were conspicuously fellow-workers in the task of interpreting Nature, twin-priests of her mysteries, twin-prophets of her message. Wordsworth's work in this capacity needs no insisting on. Readers have dwelt, only too readily and exclusively, on his merits as a poet of landscape. They have recognized that he at least, after the long spell of blindness or crooked vision, wrote of natural phenomena with his eye on the object; at last spoke the "truth in love" of the common objects of the country. But Shelley's idealism has deceived many readers into the belief

that his scenery was all *invented:* that his poetic world was fairyland, where realistic standards cannot be applied, and it is irrelevant to ask for truth of portraiture. And, so far as definite terrestrial effects are concerned, there is some justification for the belief. Shelley had the generalizing, not the particularizing habit in his Nature-work; and the habit prompts him, when he is dealing with the surface of the earth and its vegetation, to idealize his objects beyond reality. This is very conspicuous in *The Sensitive Plant*, in which Shelley might, if he would, have given us a real garden, and does not do so. But there was left for him one province—the world of the atmosphere, of the clouds, winds, and dews—where his genius hampered him with no stumbling-blocks, where his idealism was the handmaid of an unapproached and unapproachable fidelity to fact. Nothing, even in Wordsworth, is so true to Nature as Shelley's atmospheric and meteorological poetry. The atmosphere was his home, his element, and he could not report falsely of it. *The Cloud* is fantastic, if you will; but every statement may be verified every day. It is because the skylark is a bird of the air beyond all others—because it sings at heaven's gate—that Shelley so loved it; and it is because his poem is in the best sense realistic that it is so popular. The beauty of the *Ode to the West Wind* is in its truth; its imagination is in its exactitude. And when the poet, at the climax of his passion, calls for identification with the wind—*Be thou me, impetuous one!*—he does but proclaim himself as the very child and voice of the elements in the popular sense of the word. Such a poet of the weather, of water, air, and fire, so ethereal, so genuine, there had never been before.

Wordsworth's kinship with Keats was much more distant than his kinship with Shelley. To the one poet Wordsworth himself was as deaf and blind as to the other. The well-known story of his comment when Keats read him the Hymn to Pan, from *Endymion: A very pretty piece of paganism*, fairly represents, we may be sure, the kind of comment he would have made on the rest of Keats's poetry if he had known it. On the other hand, Keats was as much interested in Wordsworth as Shelley was; and something is to be learned from his recorded feelings and opinions about him as to the relations, if any, between Wordsworth's work and his own.

Wordsworth never saw Shelley; but Keats he met several times. They had a common friend in Haydon, the painter, who took pleasure in bringing them together. In December, 1817, Wordsworth, with his wife and Dora, was in London. He visited his brother, Dr. Christopher Wordsworth, at Lambeth, and saw many friends. The Lambs, of course, were much in his circle; Coleridge was at Highgate, and in sociable mood; the assiduous Crabb Robinson was everywhere to bear testimony. It was an important moment in British literature; Coleridge had just published *Biographia Literaria*, and was taking advice as to the wisdom of prosecuting *Blackwood*, of which the first number had appeared in October, for libel. Shelley's *Revolt of Islam* was just out, and so was Keats's first miscellaneous volume, which was to be followed by *Endymion* in the spring. *Lalla Rookh* was a poem of the year, and Coleridge was disgusted with it. Wordsworth did not please Crabb Robinson as much as usual on this occasion; he thought him sometimes contradictory and egotistical, and inclined to be hard on Coleridge. When Keats first saw Wordsworth, he too had an unpleasing impression. He thought him pompous and stiff; he kept him a long time waiting when he went to pay his respects, and came into the room dressed to dine with another Commissioner of Stamps, looking grand in knee-breeches, silk stockings, and stiff collar. To the Bohemian, open-necked Keats this was repellent. Yet he wanted to see more of Wordsworth, and Haydon arranged a dinner-party in his rooms for December 28th. Charles Lamb was there, and Wordsworth, and Keats's friend, Monkhouse. Everybody was at his best that day, though to Charles Lamb's best alcohol contributed considerably. There was much literary talk at dinner. Lamb's interventions in the midst of Wordsworth's solemn discourse reminded Haydon of the Fool's interruptions of Lear's passion. Lamb grew merrier and merrier. Wordsworth had been denouncing Voltaire. "Now," said Lamb, "you old lake poet, you rascally poet, why do you call Voltaire dull?" *À propos* of Newton's head in one of Haydon's pictures, they discussed poetry and science. "A fellow," Lamb said of Newton, "who believed nothing unless it was as clear as the three sides of a triangle!" Keats and he agreed that Newton's prism had destroyed the rainbow, as Keats afterwards sang in *Lamia*—

"Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven;
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
Unweave a rainbow."

In all the fun and extravagance Wordsworth heartily joined after his manner. After dinner an inimitable intellectual toady —like Wordsworth, a Comptroller of Stamps—turned up, and his platitudes gave Lamb—now more than half-seas-over—a great opportunity. "Don't you think, sir," said the new guest to Wordsworth, "that Milton was a great genius?" The rest, though it has been told so often, must be told yet once more in Haydon's words. "Keats looked at me, Wordsworth at the Comptroller. Lamb, who was dozing by the fire, turned round and said, 'Pray, sir, did you say Milton was a great genius?' 'No, sir; I asked Mr. Wordsworth if he were not.' 'Oh,' said Lamb, 'then you are a silly fellow.' 'Charles! my dear Charles!' said Wordsworth; but Lamb, perfectly innocent of the confusion he had created, was off again by the fire. After an awful pause, the Comptroller said, 'Don't you think Newton a great genius?' I could not stand it any longer. Keats put his head into my books. . . . Wordsworth seemed asking himself, 'Who is this?' Lamb got up, and taking a candle, said, 'Sir, will you allow me to look at your phrenological development?' He then turned his back on the poor man, and at every question of the Comptroller he chaunted—

"'Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John
Went to bed with his breeches on.'

"The man in office, finding Wordsworth did not know who he was, said in a spasmodic and half-chuckling anticipation of assured victory, 'I have had the honour of some correspondence with you, Mr. Wordsworth.' 'With me, sir?' said Wordsworth, 'not that I remember.' 'Don't you, sir? I am a Comptroller of Stamps.' There was a dead silence; the Comptroller evidently thinking that was enough. While we were waiting for Wordsworth's reply, Lamb sung out—

"'Hey diddle, diddle,
The cat and the fiddle.'

"'My dear Charles!' said Wordsworth—

"'Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John,"

chaunted Lamb, and then rising, exclaimed, 'Do let me have another look at that gentleman's organs.' Keats and I hurried Lamb into the painting-room, shut the door, and gave way to inextinguishable laughter. Monkhouse followed and tried to get Lamb away. We went back, but the Comptroller was irreconcilable. We soothed and smiled and asked him to supper. He stayed, though his dignity was sorely affected. However, being a good-natured man, we parted all in good humour, and no ill effects followed. All the while, until Monkhouse succeeded, we could hear Lamb struggling in the painting-room, and calling at intervals, 'Who is that fellow? Allow me to see his organs once more.'"

Keats's feeling about Wordsworth wavered, but was on the whole respectful and appreciative. In a sonnet of 1816 he dedicated to him four sonorous lines—

"Great spirits now on earth are sojourning
He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,
Who on Helvellyn's summit, wide awake
Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing."

He probably agreed with Leigh Hunt, who, with many grumbles, recognized Wordsworth as the foremost of the reformers of poetry after the post-Restoration lapse, whose work was celebrated by Keats in his *Sleep and Poetry*. Haydon proposed to send the sonnet to Wordsworth; and Keats told him that the proposal put him "out of breath." "You know," he wrote, "with what reverence I would send my well-wishes to him." He was never weary of repeating the *Intimations of Immortality* Ode; and in January, 1818, when he was fresh from personal intercourse with Wordsworth, he spoke of *The Excursion* as one of the few satisfactory artistic products of the time. On the other hand, he was riled by much in both Wordsworth's personality and his poetry. He wrote to his brothers that Wordsworth had "left a bad impression wherever he visited in town by his egotism, vanity, and bigotry." Yet he maintained that he was "a great poet." He spoke of himself once as

liking "half of Wordsworth." In a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds—who wrote the first skit on *Peter Bell*—he entered upon a subtle criticism of Wordsworth's achievement. He realized that the human heart was indeed, as Wordsworth claimed, the main region of his song. He wondered whether he had real "epic passion." He compared him with Milton. Both poets he felt to be partial, fragmentary; he wanted Wordsworth to produce something more, something different. With a truly critical instinct he took the *Tintern Abbey* lines as representing Wordsworth at his best, and he evidently felt in its fulness the power of those lines—how firmly they front the mystery of life; how clearly they see and show the light beyond it. Milton, he thought, had no such vision of the light. As for himself, he was but a child in knowledge of life, beginning to be conscious of its mystery and adversity, and of doors opening, but only into darkness.

In the summer of 1818 Keats was walking with a friend in the Lake country, and of course called at Rydal Mount. To his disappointment and displeasure Wordsworth was at Kendal taking part in the General Election of the year; so Keats could only leave a note on the mantelpiece. It was the election about which Wordsworth wrote his *Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmorland;* and Keats, though much more indifferent to politics than Shelley and Byron, was of course on the Liberal side, and antagonistic to Wordsworth accordingly.

Some months later, Keats was putting himself into a different poetic category from Wordsworth's, which he distinguished as the "egotistical sublime," and as containing Wordsworth alone. He ranked himself, on the other hand, as a *normal* poet, *i.e.* a non-moral one; an artist without preferences, having "as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen." Here he was deeply unjust to poetry; but he was not unjust to himself. Indeed, if we combine Keats's two self-estimates—this one, namely, and his consciousness of himself as hardly beyond the stage of childhood in his poetic experience of life, we shall understand his art, and the slenderness of the tie which binds it to Wordsworth's.

Keats did not live long enough to make the human heart or human life the main object—he hardly made it at all an object—of his song. He is perhaps the most non-moral poet in

English, certainly the most non-moral English poet of modern times. And he was this not from any weakness, not from any error, but from a preoccupation with mere beauty which was entirely honourable and natural, and, as he himself recognized, belongs to the youth, the opening stage, of the poet's experience. He was not one to express at any time, like Shelley, his ecstasy in a "shriek"; but his thirst for the beautiful, his joy in it, was of the kind which Shelley felt when he made his quest "and clapped his hands" at his discovery. Only, as to Shelley, the intellectual and moral revealed themselves in such close contiguity with the beautiful, that he could hardly for a moment cease to be a moral poet; human error and human hope, as he conceived them, were interwoven with every show of Nature; and beauty was raised, by the presence of its opposites, into the unearthly and divine. Keats had his moral moments, his brief essays at a "criticism of life." In his *Ode to Melancholy* and in the great lyrical apostrophe to sorrow in *Endymion*, he touches the harp with all his might, and reveals a pessimism which would be unendurable if it were not fugitive. Here and there in *Hyperion*, he utters, without ceasing to be his best self, wisdom as deep and as mellow as ever was Shakespeare's or Wordsworth's.

> "Now comes the pain of truth to whom 'tis pain;
> O folly! for to bear all naked truths,
> And to envisage circumstance, all calm,
> That is the top of sovereignty."

The whole of Oceanus's speech in the second book, in which these lines occur, has exactly as much ethical as æsthetic value. It is very likely that if Keats had lived, lived beyond his intoxication with beauty, his mere artist's satisfaction, he would have given us much poetry of a like strain. But, taking his fragmentary bequest as it stands, we feel that the central Keats is in *The Eve of S. Agnes*, *Lamia*, the *Ode to Autumn*, the *Ode to Psyche*; in poetry which shows him with a boundless appetite for the beautiful as the pleasurable, and not as an unearthly abstraction, but as actualized in beautiful things, taken indiscriminately from the earth and air, from Grecian mythology, or from mediæval romance. The essential Keats is an artist, a painter of pictures for beauty's sake. And he is an artist, as

we said, without preferences, "having as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen," except, we may add, that his moral sense is hardly as yet enough developed to make him take much interest in either of them.

Keats's non-morality, his love of "pretty pieces of Paganism," removes him very far from Wordsworth. But we are here comparing our poets, less with each other than with their predecessors; we are thinking of them as, among them, restoring to English poetry certain great things which it seemed to have lost; and the greater the unlikenesses within the band, the more interesting is the joint result. We have just quoted a passage from Keats which Wordsworth might have countersigned; and, as for Paganism, it has been pointed out that Wordsworth himself had a moment when he cried—

> "Great God! I'd rather be
> A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
> Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn."

But it is not in such stray parallelisms that the fellowship of Keats and Wordsworth, or, indeed, the unity of all the great poets of the Romantic Revival, is to be found. Wordsworth and Keats were at least on the same plane in their sense, quick and novel and inspiring, of what Keats called the "poetry of earth"; they both possessed what is the innermost nerve of poetry, the power of finding the beautiful, and showing it in their words to others for all time. And, different as, in many respects, their ideas of it were, they were both wise enough to know that beauty is a unity in diversity; that it has its temperate and torrid zones; its simplicities as well as its complexities; its restraints as well as its licences; that it is here as well as yonder; in the spirit as well as in the body. Both poets meet in the shelter of Shelley's phrase—

> "That Beauty in which all things work and move."

In this comprehensiveness of the beautiful is to be found the community of that poetry of the early nineteenth century to which Wordsworth was so great a contributor. Hardly one of his peers and younger contemporaries, certainly not Southey,

not Byron, not Scott, but was alive with a quick sense of beauty such as generations had not felt. It is the quickness, the novelty, the pulsing throb of the sense, which makes it impossible for the poets of the Romantic Revival to disown one another. Poets with the classical ideal, poets like Milton and Gray, splendid as are their services to the beautiful, do not give the feeling of novelty, of young enthusiasm, which the Romanticists gave. They too cannot disown, be disowned; but they are in a separate province, the province held by tradition, by its majesty, its dignity, its repose.

Wordsworth has often been compared with Milton; but not, it seems, with any fruitful result. One may set the blank verse of the one beside that of the other to establish the inferiority of Wordsworth's. They were alike patriots, alike grave, moral, serious poets. But Wordsworth was an innovator and a restorer; and it was no tradition, Miltonic or other, that he restored, it was of his own underived, vigorous individuality that he gave. In spite of his sobriety, his narrowness, his cold welcome of novelty, the world in which he lived was a new world, and he saw and felt it anew, with an untaught and enthusiastic mind. His poetry was no product of culture; it was the immediate reaction of an original mind to the beautiful significance of things. And it was the same with his peers. They all felt the world afresh; and as they felt, they sang, a harmony of many voices.

RYDAL MOUNT

CHAPTER XIII

AFTERGLOW

RYDAL MOUNT, to which the Wordsworths moved from Grasmere in 1813, is one of the most purely ideal poets' residences in the world. Hidden, like the nest of a shy bird, from wanton eyes and approaches, it looks out frankly in two directions. It stands on a spur of Nab Scar, rising with sudden steepness from the road, just at the angle—almost a right angle—between the valley containing Rydal lake, and the valley along which the Rothay flows to Windermere. Down this latter valley, past Loughrigg and across the light smoke-wreath of Ambleside, the homely frontage of the house looks southward to the distant gleam of the lake. With a yet nobler and more subtly suggestive outlook, a door in the western gable, and the rocky terraces to which it leads, show Rydal water and its island, the northern side of Loughrigg, and the way to Grasmere. On the eastern side lies, unseen from the Mount, the fine park-like demesne of Rydal Hall, with the wild heights and recesses of Fairfield in the background.

The house and grounds, save for some modernizing of windows, and the hand of time on shrub and tree, have been hardly changed since the Wordsworths lived and died there. There are the same pleasant low-roofed sitting-rooms, the same broad central staircase, the twisted chimneys, the bedrooms where the poet and his wife and sister died. There is the same view-point southwards, led to by descending and ascending steps. Above all, there is the extension and expansion of what gave Dove Cottage its chief charm—a simple and yet ingenious landscape-gardening; steps, terraces, shrubbery, summer-houses; rocky paths, pink with Wordsworth's own geranium, and yellow with the pale poppy, which haunts all dwellers among the Lakes.

Rydal Mount has a spaciousness and dignity which dwarf poor little Dove Cottage and its tiny hanging-orchard into very humble stature. Yet in both places there is the same spiritual suggestion; the same essential dignity; the same undying association. Here, as there, is a perfect setting for "plain living and high thinking," the fitting abode of a Nature-worshipper, for whom the humblest flower and loneliest rock speak the language of a Universal Mind and Heart; here, as there, we see and hear the same stooping, burly, austere, carelessly clad figure, somewhat harsh in voice and feature, but with eyes of infinite expression, muttering lines of verse as he paces up and down his terraces, or lies at length on daisy-sprinkled grass. Rydal Mount was a fit place for the kind of star-gazing that the Wordsworths loved; for the stars seemed to touch the hilltops at the back, while among the trees in the valley southward they twinkled like lamps. Wordsworth drew from them a parable of his poetic mission. "If thou indeed," he exclaims, addressing the Poet—

> "If thou indeed derive thy light from Heaven,
> Then, to the measure of that heaven-born light
> Shine, Poet! in thy place, and be content:
> The stars, pre-eminent in magnitude,
> And they that from the zenith dart their beams,
> (Visible though they be to half the earth,
> Though half a sphere be conscious of their brightness)
> Are yet of no diviner origin,
> No purer essence, than the one that burns,
> Like an untended watch-fire on the ridge
> Of some dark mountain; or than those which seem
> Humbly to hang, like twinkling winter lamps,
> Among the branches of the leafless trees.
> All are the undying offspring of one sire:
> Then, to the measure of the light vouchsafed,
> Shine, Poet! in thy place, and be content."

An increase of income, won not without much difficulty, enabled the poet to go to the larger house, and become something of a country gentleman on a small scale. Lord Lonsdale made him Commissioner of Stamps for Westmorland, with a salary of £400 a year, and the modest Wordsworth was thus enabled to snap his fingers at mere literary profits. But it was chiefly to escape from the shadow of death at Grasmere, from the daily,

hourly sight of his children's new graves, that he finally left the dear Vale. The moment had come, which comes now and again in most lives, when a new leaf must be firmly and resolutely turned. And so Wordsworth, at forty-three, entered on the last thirty-seven years of his life.

When one thinks of these figures, and looks at the mass of poetry yet to be produced by Wordsworth, it may seem mere paradox to speak of the move to Rydal as a sunset, and the life there as afterglow. And, indeed, it may be put in much too paradoxical a way. Matthew Arnold, with the best intentions, did Wordsworth a disservice when he spoke as if his only good poetry had been composed between 1798 and 1808. The contrast between Wordsworth's best work and his merely good, or even that between his best and his worst, striking as it is, is not miraculous; and his later, his Rydalian work, is full of interest for all lovers of him and lovers of poetry. Yet it is unquestionable that Wordsworth did not live or produce at his fullest strength after he went to Rydal Mount. He became prematurely elderly; his verse lost much of its passion and felicity; his splendid patriotism tended towards a prejudiced insularity; his fine instinct for public righteousness towards a querulous and close-fisted conservatism. Wordsworth's youth in one sense departed so early; the mood of the *Tintern Abbey* lines and the *Immortality Ode*, the mood—so to call it—of *Nevermore!* set in so soon and so permanently, that at forty-three Wordsworth, who was always old-fashioned, had become really old. If he had lived to be a hundred, he would hardly have been older in spirit in 1870 than he was in 1820.

Passionate movements rocked the crust of British life while Wordsworth lived at Rydal. Liberalism, with its lurid portents and solid achievements; the poetry of Shelley and Keats; scientific development and mechanical invention; Tractarianism; Chartism; but of none of them did Wordsworth sing; in none of them did he take other interest than that of a rather languid and often disapproving spectator. His days and his verse flowed on serenely; his fame steadily and noiselessly grew; his hair silvered, his high-nosed face grew grimly lined; then, unexpectedly, he sickened and died when he was just eighty. Hardly any fresh light or heat was given out during the thirty-seven years. It was mostly afterglow.

So far as quantitative production went, there was no sign of stint or decline. In 1814 appeared *The Excursion*, which Wordsworth meant to be, and which in many respects is, of his ripest work; but that, as we know, was first conceived at Racedown, and the greatest part of it was written at Grasmere. It was issued from Rydal Mount with a preface, and a Dedicatory Sonnet to Lord Lonsdale, somewhat in the strain, though with none of the spirit, of the days of pre-Johnsonian patronage. Waterloo year, 1815, is very important in Wordsworth's bibliography, for then appeared the first collected edition of his poems, and also *The White Doe of Rylstone*. As for *The White Doe*, we remember that he introduced De Quincey to it in 1807; but it was regularly begun at Stockton-upon-Tees, and completed at Dove Cottage. Among the collected poems there was one new one of great importance—a noble first-fruits of Rydal Mount—Wordsworth's finest classical poem, *Laodamia*. He himself once, in one of his flashes of excessive self-esteem, put it with *Lycidas* in a unique class. If that was too bold, it is not too much to find in *Laodamia* a genuine phase of the Greek spirit, the Greek restraint, the Greek subordination of personal emotion to public obligation, expressed in English verse of the stateliest grace. Laodamia wins back the spirit of her slaughtered lord, Protesilaus, but only to learn from his lips the philosophy of an emotion transcending and outlasting even the holiest nuptial passion; to hear a description of Elysium touched with hues of the Christian heaven.

> "Be taught, O faithful Consort, to control
> Rebellious passion; for the gods approve
> The depth, and not the tumult, of the soul."
>
> "He spake of love, such love as Spirits feel
> In worlds whose course is equable and pure;
> No fears to beat away—no strife to heal—
> The past unsighed for, and the future sure;
> Spake of heroic arts in graver mood
> Revived, with finer harmony pursued;
>
> "Of all that is most beauteous—imaged there
> In happier beauty; more pellucid streams,
> An ampler ether, a diviner air,
> And fields invested with purpureal gleams;
> Climes which the sun, who sheds the brightest day
> Earth knows, is all unworthy to survey."

Here is taught the lesson of ideal widowhood, but in vain—

> "Learn, by a mortal yearning, to ascend—
> Seeking a higher object. Love was given,
> Encouraged, sanctioned, chiefly for that end;
> For this, the passion to excess was driven—
> That self might be annulled: her bondage prove
> The fetters of a dream, opposed to love."

Laodamia could not take the lesson: as the Spirit retired from her, she died in her rebellious passion—

> "And, as for a wilful crime,
> By the just Gods, whom no weak pity moved,
> Was doomed to wear out her appointed time,
> Apart from happy Ghosts,"

and the poem ends in tragic hopelessness.

In the same first Rydal year was written another classical poem, *Dion*. Dion of Syracuse, the rich warrior who forsook wealth for philosophic poverty, and was driven from Sicily to attach himself to Plato at Athens, showed himself in Wordsworth's "study of imagination" as a kind of swan-like being, an image of "haughtiness without pretence," unfolding "a still magnificence." The poet sees him Plato's pupil, learning the secret of high life—

> "What pure homage *then* did wait
> On Dion's virtues, while the lunar beam
> Of Plato's genius, from its lofty sphere,
> Fell round him in the grove of Academe,
> Softening their inbred dignity austere;
> That he, not too elate
> With self-sufficing solitude,
> But with majestic lowliness endued,
> Might in the universal bosom reign,
> And from affectionate observance gain
> Help, under every change of adverse fate."

But alas! he goes back to Syracuse as a vulgar conqueror, and his hands are reddened with blood. The poet calls on Academe to mourn—

> "Mourn, hills and groves of Attica! and mourn
> Ilissus, bending o'er thy classic urn!
> Mourn . . .

For him who to divinity aspired
. . . . . .
Intent to trace the ideal path of right
. . . . . .
But He hath overleaped the eternal bars."

A hideous spectre appears to him; the spectre of the lower life into which he has gone down. He sinks into death; and for him there is no resurrection. Nothing but a stern moral survives—

"Him only pleasure leads, and peace attends,
Him, only him, the shield of Jove defends,
Whose means are fair and spotless as his ends."

Yarrow Visited is another of the Rydal first-fruits which the world will not willingly allow to decay. In 1814 Wordsworth paid his second visit to Scotland, this time with his wife and her sister, Sarah Hutchinson. There was no Dorothy to write another journal; and the commemorative poems are few. But, on a September day, Wordsworth, with James Hogg, the "Ettrick Shepherd," and a certain Dr. Anderson (whose collection of "British Poets" had introduced Wordsworth to Chaucer and the Elizabethans) walked from Traquair into that Vale of Yarrow which he would not see eleven years earlier. What he found there is perhaps too well known to be written out here.

Waterloo and its sequels brought forth at last the *Thanksgiving Ode* of January, 1816, with some flanking poems. One turns to them with interest to see how they compare with the great anti-Napoleonic sonnets. They are fine and impressive, though they lack the fresh fire of the early sonnets.

It is plain that for Wordsworth the battle of Waterloo closed an epoch: the monster, begotten of the French Revolution, was laid low; the killing spell was lifted off the world, and by providentially chosen Britain. Thenceforward Wordsworth's social and political feeling took the normal Conservative course; the fort of English liberty, the fort of English religion, secured by a perfectly balanced constitution, a perfectly reformed Church, were to be held at all costs. Wordsworth's Rydalian muse was a faultless conformist.

The records of hardening conformity are abundant, both in prose and verse. Towards the Liberal movement which set in in the 'twenties of the nineteenth century, and which led to the

Reform Bill and other great measures of constitutional and administrative amendment in the 'thirties, Wordsworth felt an aversion which was natural, and may or may not have been justifiable; but his dismal vaticinations, his conviction, uttered with accompaniment of inarticulate groans, that Liberalism,—whether it took the form of Catholic Emancipation, of the rationalizing of Parliamentary representation, the advocacy of vote by ballot, or even of municipal reform,—was a mere process of ruin, are hardly more than psychological eccentricities. He wrote doleful letters to his friends. A great poetry born of emotion so baseless there could hardly be. Typical of the mood, alike in its sincerity and its weakness, are the lines which Wordsworth discharged on the innocent head of his first grandchild in 1834. Oppressed by the thought of what might lie before the infant, he gives expression to his fears. He cannot make up his mind whether the child has been born too early or too late. He sees "ensigns of mimic outrage unfurled," and he asks—

> "Who shall preserve or prop the tottering Realm?
> . . . . . .
> If to expedience principle must bow;
> Past, future, shrinking up beneath the incumbent Now;
> If cowardly concession still must feed
> The thirst for power in men who ne'er concede;
> Nor turn aside, unless to shape a way
> For domination at some riper day;
> . . . . . .
> If office help the factions to conspire,
> And they who *should* extinguish, fan the fire—
> Then, will the sceptre be a straw, the crown
> Sit loosely, like the thistle's crest of down;
> To be blown off at will, by Power that spares it
> In cunning patience, from the head that wears it."

and so on, through leagues of dreary heroics.

Wordsworth's feeling about the Church was richer and more positive, and lent itself to a better poetry than his feeling about the State. It is interesting to trace his relations to the revival in the Church of England which had its most widely known expression in the so-called Oxford Movement. Long before the Movement was born, long before Keble published *The Christian Year*, Wordsworth had departed somewhat from the ordinary Protestant view current in his youth, of the ecclesiastical

history of the seventeenth century. In 1822 he had incurred censure by his favourable estimate of Laud. On the other hand, though his churchmanship steadily grew more definite and jealous as years went on, though he lived to declare his general sympathy with what has been called the "Catholic Revival," he never at any time showed the genuine Tractarian *animus*. His full reverence for Milton was never soiled by controversial prejudice. One compares Keble's recorded impression of Presbyterian churches with Wordsworth's poem, written in 1831, *On the Sight of a Manse in the South of Scotland*—

> "Say, ye far-travelled clouds, far-seeing hills—
> Among the happiest-looking homes of men
> Scattered all Britain over, through deep glen,
> On airy upland, and by forest rills,
> And o'er wide plains cheered by the ark that trills
> His sky-born warblings—does aught meet your ken
> More fit to animate the Poet's pen,
> Aught that more surely by its aspect fills
> Pure minds with sinless envy, than the Abode
> Of the good Priest: who, faithful through all hours
> To his high charge, and truly serving God
> Has yet a heart and hand for trees and flowers,
> Enjoys the walks his predecessors trod,
> Nor covets lineal rights in lands and towers."

Fancy Keble writing such a poem!

The chief poetic monument of Wordsworth's churchmanship is the long series of *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, the greater number of which were published as "Ecclesiastical Sketches" in 1822, though some were written earlier and some later. The sequence traces the story of English Christianity from its introduction to the "Present Times." The impulse to make it came from the sight of a new church on the Beaumonts' estate in Leicestershire. Much the same feeling was stirred in the poet's mind when the Rydal chapel was built below the Mount by the Flemings, that chapel in which he for the last time bent the knee a few weeks before his death. At various points the sonnets reflect Wordsworth's characteristic attitude in churchmanship—the moderation, the Protestantism, of his Anglicanism. Here is no aversion from Ridley, Latimer, Cranmer; here is even the traditional view of the Scottish Covenanters—

"Slain by Compatriot-protestants that draw
From councils senseless as intolerant
Their warrant."

Wordsworth's typical parish-priest uses his authority, neither at the altar nor in the confessional, but in the pulpit (No. 18). The sonnets are not all historical: some deal with aspects of ritual, baptism, matrimony, and what not. And they end with a fine vision of the stream of English Church history and its goal—

"The living Waters, less and less by guilt
Stained and polluted, brighten as they roll,
Till they have reached the eternal City—built
For the perfécted Spirit of the just!"

Towards the expression of the poetry of his own neighbourhood and of the Lake country at large, Wordsworth did much in the Rydal days. The privacy of his larger demesne favoured his chosen method of composition; up and down his terraces he would walk, growling, murmuring, *booing* (as his humble neighbours called it) his lines. Often they lack inspiration of feeling and felicity of phrase; often the didacticism is too prominent, the moralizing too trite. Now and then, however, there is all that one could wish of landscape spiritualized.

A more delightful sonnet sequence than the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* is the series to the *River Duddon*, the stream that rises west of the Langdale Pike region, and falls, after a short course, into the Irish Sea. Many a sight and sound in the Rydal Mount garden, or among the stately trees of the Hall; many a vision of star hanging over the trees, or glow-worm clinging to the rock, yielded its secret to the poet as he grew old in his last home. Among the finest of these later Nature-poems are those classed by him as *Evening Voluntaries;* and among them the very finest is the sunset-picture, "Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty." Written in 1818, it can in no sense be said to belong to old age; yet it expresses what we recognize as Wordsworth's final view of some of the mysteries with which he dealt in the *Immortality Ode.* In this aspect it is very important.

Standing on his view-point in front of the house, the poet sees an unparalleled afterglow in the western heavens. He

reads in it, not a conventional vision of the past, but an ideal of the beyond, of the future. No choirs of angels, singing between sky and earth, could be more moving than the natural spectacle—

> "This silent spectacle—the gleam—
> The shadow—and the peace supreme!"

Yet there is more in the sight than the purely natural; there are agencies at work more august than the purple evening—

> "From worlds not quickened by the sun
> A portion of the gift is won."

The hills, climbing towards the boundless glory, are a parable of the vision of old age, of the compensation, beyond life, for life's pain and loss.

> "Come forth, ye drooping old men, look abroad,
> And see to what fair countries ye are bound!
> And if some traveller, weary of his road,
> Hath slept since noon-tide on the grassy ground,
> Ye Genii! to his covert speed;
> And wake him with such gentle heed
> As may attune his soul to meet the dower
> Bestowed on this transcendent hour!"

In this vision the poet finds a restoration of what he had deplored the loss of in the *Immortality Ode*. It is but a gleam, indeed; but it is the true lost light. And so he prays—

> "Dread Power! whom peace and calmness serve
> No less than Nature's threatening voice,
> If aught unworthy be my choice,
> From *Thee* if I would swerve;
> Oh, let thy grace remind me of the light
> Full early lost, and fruitlessly deplored;
> Which, at this moment, on my waking sight
> Appears to shine, by miracle restored;
> My soul, though yet confined to earth,
> Rejoices in a second birth!"

The shade of difference between this mood and that of the last stanza of the *Immortality Ode*, is the difference between the earlier and the later Wordsworth, between the Wordsworth of poetic, and the Wordsworth of religious, faith. Whether the

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

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change was not made at some cost of imagination is open to question.

A considerable part of Wordsworth's Rydal life was spent in travelling. Visits to London there frequently were; visits which brought the rural poet into contact with old friends like Lamb, Coleridge, and Crabb Robinson; fellow-craftsmen like Rogers, Moore, and Crabbe. There were tours in Scotland, tours on the Continent, which yielded large crops of thoughtful, but hardly inspired, verse.

Fruition, which, in Wordsworth's case, never took a pecuniary form, came at last in the better shape of fame. In the course of the 'thirties, in the moment of pause between the living renown of Byron, and the coming importance of Tennyson and Browning, England's high places awoke to a sense of Wordsworth's rank. Cambridge, his own university, bowed before him; in 1839 came his open triumph at Oxford, when, amid the thunders of the Theatre, he received his Doctor's degree. It is not difficult to call up the strong bony figure in the scarlet robe, and the dignity of the wrinkled face; not difficult to see Keble in the rostrum, and hear the Latin sentences in which the poet of *The Christian Year* claimed academic honour for the poet of poverty, philosophy, and religion. Bunsen was there to be honoured with Wordsworth. Dr. Arnold was looking on, having come from Rugby for the day; Robertson of Brighton, still an undergraduate, was there, rather shocked, in his early enthusiasm, by the pomp in which the simple unworldly poet was made to share. Never, by general consent, did the old walls echo to more rapturous applause.

A few years later, when Southey died in 1843, came the Laureateship. At first Wordsworth refused, fearing, in his seventy-fourth year, the "duties" belonging to the office. But Sir Robert Peel, the Prime Minister, wrote that there was no purpose of imposing duties, but only of paying "that tribute of respect which is justly due to the first of living poets." And he added, as he well might, that there was no question as to who should be selected.

"The first of living poets." That, after all the vicissitudes of Wordsworth's reputation, was the national judgment. Yet even then the poetic pause was at an end; the old order was changing and giving place to new. When the laurel was set on

Wordsworth's brow, Tennyson was a famous poet; Browning had published *Paracelsus* and *Strafford* and *Pippa;* Matthew Arnold was an undergraduate at Oxford, with poetry ready to come. Wordsworth had several pleasant meetings with his successor in the Laureateship, and he cordially recognized his achievement and promise. In 1845, when the old poet made his official appearance at the State ball, in Rogers's uniform borrowed for the occasion, he saw Tennyson several times, and applied to him Peel's phrase about himself, "the first of living poets." Tennyson expressed cordial appreciation of Wordsworth, and was greatly pleased by Wordsworth's cordiality to him. He remembered how, when he dined in Wordsworth's company, Wordsworth said to him, "Come, brother bard, to dinner"; and took his arm. Tennyson gave Wordsworth the impression that he was "not much in sympathy with what I should myself most value in any attempts, viz. the spirituality with which I have endeavoured to invest the material universe, and the moral relations under which I have wished to exhibit its most ordinary appearances." He congratulated Tennyson upon *Dora*, as being a success in a line which he had often attempted, but in which he had never succeeded.

What Wordsworth knew of Browning's poetry we cannot tell. He took a kindly interest in Elizabeth Barrett and her writings; and when she and Browning married, in 1846, he wrote that she had married a very able man. And he added sardonically, "Doubtless they will speak more intelligibly to each other than they have yet done to the public."

As the growing light of fame fell on Wordsworth, a shadow came on his home life. Dorothy's companionship, which, since his childhood, had been the main human influence in his life, was withdrawn from him, gradually, but steadily. At the age of fifty-six she had a serious illness, while she was keeping house for her nephew, John Wordsworth, at Whitwick, near Loughborough and Coleorton; and she never properly recovered from it. In 1832 her brother was writing, "Coleridge and my beloved sister are the two beings to whom my intellect is most indebted, and they are now proceeding, as it were, *pari passu*, along the path of sickness; I will not say towards the grave, but I trust towards a blessed immortality." Dorothy's life was prolonged beyond the limits of her brother's; but never again

was she able to quit the "path of sickness." She dropped, very gradually and gently, but very steadily, into that saddest valley of the shadow, where life ebbs with maimed intelligence. Her decline was hastened by the death, in 1835, of Mrs. Wordsworth's sister, Sarah Hutchinson, who had been for a long time a beloved member of the family. She retained her general intelligence, her literary task, and literary memory; but of the present she took no heed. The radiant, eager Dorothy! She is clearly remembered still, wheeled about the garden at the Mount, and scattering, as in better days, nods and smiles on those she knew and loved.

Dorothy's fate saddened Wordsworth's afterglow; but his were the "years that bring the philosophic mind," his was a tranquillity of resignation, a "calm of mind, all passion spent," which made such sorrow a fortification, not a weakening or overthrow. And there was much to compensate: happy family-life, with patriarchal satisfaction; deep friendships; the sense of slow, well-earned fame, bringing modest admirers to look on their poet face to face.

It is a pleasant picture that Sir John Taylor Coleridge, nephew of the poet, and father of the Lord Chief Justice of the future, gives of the Wordsworths as he saw them in 1836, and it may be taken as fairly representative of their aspect at that period. Coleridge was with his family at Fox How, lent by the Arnolds for six weeks; and the Rydal Mount people were their only neighbours. In the mornings Wordsworth was busy with the proofs of the first six-volume edition of his complete poems; in the afternoons he was ready for long walks. Coleridge tells us how delightful these walks were made by the poet's talk—by its raciness of the soil, its evidence of minute natural and local observation, of insight into character, of sympathy with the homeliest types. He was struck by Wordsworth's interest in landscape-gardening. He describes a little scene in the grounds of Rydal Mount. He found Wordsworth in anxious dialogue with his gardener. "James and I," said he, "are in a puzzle here. The grass here has spots which offend the eye; and I told him we must cover them with soap-lees. 'That,' he says 'will make the green there darker than the rest.' 'Then,' I said, 'we must cover the whole.' He objected: 'That will not do with reference to the little lawn to which you

pass from this.' 'Cover that,' I said. To which he replies, 'You will have an unpleasant contrast with the foliage surrounding it.'"

Wordsworth was always ready to talk of poetry, including his own; though as to the latter it seemed to Coleridge that he showed no forwardness. He let his companion into some of the secrets of his "diction"; telling him how his narrative poems were all founded on fact; how, when his stories were acquired by hearsay, he used in his poems the very words which they were told, "dropping all vulgarisms and provincialisms." He showed abundantly his extreme verbal and metrical fastidiousness; and blamed his constant analysis of, and theorizing about, emotion, for some injury of which he was conscious to his æsthetic sensibility and poetical power.

But more than any literary criticism, Coleridge admired Wordsworth's gracious personality; his kindly, sympathetic ways with his humbler neighbours; his fine, sturdy pedestrianism, as he "trudged" along (Coleridge chose the word because it seemed to express the "boldness" of his gait) in his plaid jacket and waistcoat, with the too frequent green shade over his unhappy eyes. When they parted, Coleridge was able to say that the more he saw of Wordsworth, the more he admired him as a poet and as a man.

Wordsworth's two sons, his eldest and youngest child, John the clergyman, and William, his father's successor in the Commissionership, both married happily in their father's lifetime, and their wives and children added to the poet's happiness. But his heart was most garnered up with his one daughter, Dora. Born in 1804, Dora had her ripening girlhood during the early time at Rydal, and she remained in the nest until 1841. She grew up into a slender graceful woman, with much of her mother in her, and especially her mother's candid trust-inspiring eyes. In 1841, when she was thirty-seven, she made a marriage which was full of promise. Twenty years before, there had come to live in the neighbourhood a very interesting man named Edward Quillinan. His father was a merchant trading with Portugal, and Edward was born at Oporto. His father's commercial career was interrupted by the French invasion of the Peninsula; and Edward entered the army, seeing a good deal of service here and there in the pre-Waterloo days. In 1817 he

married a Miss Bryder, the daughter of a baronet. In spite of his mercantile and military pre-occupations, Quillinan was a man of literary sympathy and ability; and he had been a reader and admirer of Wordsworth while Wordsworth's reputation hung in the balance. Quartered in Penrith in 1820, he rejoiced in his nearness to the poet; and, when he left the service in the following year, he settled close to him—at Rydal Cottage. There, in 1822, his wife was burned to death, leaving him with two daughters, of whom the younger, Rotha,—called after the sweet river of Grasmere and Rydal lakes—was Wordsworth's god-child. Soon after, the widower went to Kent; but the friendship with the Wordsworths suffered no check; there were interchanges of visits, and there was much literary sympathy. Quillinan wrote poetry as well as prose; and he used his skill in Portuguese to translate the *Lusiads* of Camoens. In 1841 he took Dora Wordsworth as his second wife. Wordsworth greatly valued Quillinan's friendship, but he disliked the idea of the marriage, partly, perhaps, because Quillinan, brought up a Roman Catholic, had never formally renounced his faith. But the chief obstacle was his jealous affection for his daughter, that kind of appropriating, clinging affection, by which many a father has spoiled a daughter's life before and since. All the same, the marriage took place; and the omens were fair. The Quillinans had no children, and they were able to be a good deal at Rydal Mount, so that the pain of separation was lessened. They spent one winter at Ambleside; and they were a good deal at the large square house on Belle Isle, Windermere, which he who crosses the lake by the ferry can see looking out at him from the trees. But Dora's health began to give way; a winter in Portugal was tried, about which Dora wrote books: *A Journal of a Few Months' Residence in Portugal*, and *Glimpses of the South of Spain*. She wrote them at Loughrigg Holme, quite close to Rydal, where she and her husband seemed at last to have found a settled home, where both could follow their literary pursuits in peace, under the patriarchal shadow of the Mount. But death was inexorable, and claimed her in the high summer of 1847, when she had been just a year at the Holme. We can imagine what the blow must have been to the old man of seventy-seven. He wrote no verse about it; and his utterance in letters has the restraint we should expect. To one friend he wrote: "We bear

up under our affliction as well as God enables us to do." And to another: "Our sorrow, I feel, is for life; but God's will be done!" When, less than three years later, the poet was on the brink of the River, his wife said to him: "William, you are going to Dora." Woke one morning by the entrance of one of his nieces, he said, "Is that Dora?" And, when all was over, Mrs. Wordsworth went to Dorothy and said: "Dear, he has gone to Dora."

Wordsworth never suffered the vulgar inquisitiveness which pestered Tennyson at Farringford. Pilgrims were many, indeed, but they were reverent; and Wordsworth, unlike Tennyson, mostly enjoyed their visits. His circle in the latter days at Rydal Mount was large enough, and distinguished enough, to do him ample honour. For the most part it was very different from the earlier one. The old familiar faces were mostly gone. As in an august funeral procession they pass before us in the *Extempore Effusion on the Death of James Hogg*.

One familiar face remained to the end, and beyond it. Wordsworth's son, writing by his father's dead body, called Samuel Rogers, his father's "oldest, perhaps, living friend." Rogers holds a curious place in English literature. Born in 1763, and living until 1855, he spanned nearly a century, a century of portentous literary change. Twenty, or thereabouts, when Johnson died and Cowper published his *Task*, he was past thirty when Keats was born, and alive when Tennyson had been Poet Laureate for five years. He produced poems—*The Pleasures of Memory* in 1792, and *Italy* in 1822 to 1828—poems of pensive reminiscence and well-bred description—of which everybody has heard, and everybody in the future probably will hear, the names; but which no mere lover of poetry probably will ever read. No one, even in his own day, thought of putting Rogers among the great poets; yet he might have been Poet Laureate at almost any period of his life, and he held a kind of respected mastership among all the poets. This was partly due to his Mæcenas-like qualities; to his hospitable sympathy with men of letters; to his wealth and splendid house in St. James's Place, where great men met at sumptuous breakfasts, and heard the good stories and small-voiced epigrams—not always good-natured—of the caustic little man. A bald head and wrinkled face, cadaverous in its paleness, and blue eyes which Carlyle

DORA WORDSWORTH (MRS. QUILLINAN

BY MARGARET GILLIES

called both "sorrowful" and "cruel," is shown in the pictures of Rogers. But if there was cruelty in his nature, and if it spoke out at times in his talk, there went with it enough kindness to make him famous as a good friend and a good man.

Rogers and Wordsworth first met at Grasmere in 1803, just before the first Scottish expedition. When Wordsworth, Dorothy and Coleridge set out Rogers followed them, and they were together at Dumfries. Thenceforward the friendship stood steady, founded on genuine mutual respect. Rogers turned up at the Lakes occasionally; and Wordsworth, when in town, was always a welcome guest in St. James's Place. Rogers once introduced him to Charles James Fox. He was always willing to mediate between authors and publishers; and he helped Wordsworth about the production of *The Excursion*, and others of his poems, and advised Dorothy as to the printing of her journal of the 1803 Scotch tour. Wordsworth gave wooden commendation of *Italy*, and dwelt on his daughter Dora's appreciation of it. In 1848, after Dora's death, the affection of the two old men—Roger was eighty-five—found beautiful expression. Wordsworth closed a letter to Rogers thus: "Believe me, my friend of nearly half a century, very affectionately yours," a strong phrase from him; and Rogers, in his reply, exclaimed: "What delightful days have we passed together, walking and sitting wherever we were, and more especially among the rocks and waters of your enchanting country. Oh that they were to come over again! You may well conceive how much you were in my mind during your long, long trial. Pray remember me to those who remain with you, her [Dora's] dear, dear mother and aunt, and pray believe me to be your grateful and affectionate friend."

Another link with the early days long remained in poor Hartley Coleridge, Coleridge's eldest son, and too like his father in inconstancy of purpose, and inability to achieve results. We remember him in 1807, when he was eleven, scampering downhill when De Quincey escorted his mother to Dove Cottage, and rushing in first to greet the occupants. He was always a pet of Wordsworth's. When he was six years old he had inspired Wordsworth to write one of the most exquisite lays of childhood in existence.

"O Thou! whose fancies from afar are brought;
Who of thy words dost make a mock apparel,
And fittest to unutterable thought
The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol;
Thou faery voyager! that dost float
In such clear water, that thy boat
May rather seem
To brood on air than on an earthly stream;
Suspended in a stream as clear as sky,
Where earth and heaven do make one imagery," etc.

With so wretched a home, and so unhappy a parentage on the paternal side, the boy needed outside guardians and helpers. Southey did much for him. When he was seventeen, Wordsworth wrote to that incarnation of benevolence, Thomas Poole, to ask for his advice in Hartley's behalf. It was not easy, he said, to determine what the youth was fit for; his talents were considerable; his knowledge was patchy. Poole, of course, was ready, not only with advice, but with money; and at last, Hartley went up to Oxford, where he got a Postmastership at Merton. His talents stood him in good stead at Oxford; for, in 1819, he obtained one of the Oriel Fellowships, which in those days were Oxford's greatest prizes. But what was the good of it? He was "irregular"; and one of his irregularities was intemperance. Altogether, he was too irregular for Oriel; and he never got beyond the probationary year of his Fellowship. Wordsworth said that his father's aspiration for him had been too literally fulfilled—

"But thou, my child, shalt wander like a breeze."

Like a breeze, indeed, the poor little creature—"lile Hartley," as he was fondly called at the Lakes—wandered for the rest of his life. A little journalism in London; brief spasms of schoolmastering at Ambleside and Sedbergh; the writing of some poetry, too beautiful to be wholly fugitive, and, latterly, years of desultory poetizing and pedestrianism in the Lake country, radiating from that Nab Cottage between Rydal and Grasmere whence De Quincey took his wife. In the 'forties "lile Hartley," with his squat figure, dark eyes, and bright merry face was as familiar about the haunted paths as the stately Wordsworth, and, by the rustics at least, more loved. For "lile Hartley" was always in the mood for a friendly

salutation; and his queer, uncertain gait, his ways with his walking-stick, his hurryings and stoppings, made him a lovable eccentric. Wordsworth, on the other hand—so it was reported by one of the rustics—would pass you "as if you was nobbut a stoan"; and he was chary of greetings to children. From so dear a fellow as Hartley even poetry could he endured, thought the Westmorland rustics; but Mr. Wordsworth, "booing" and murmuring his lines, his lips going upon the road, though he might be "cleverish," what was the good of him if he wouldn't give you the time of day, and look as if he enjoyed himself? Indeed, it was darkly hinted by the rustic mind that Hartley did most of Wordsworth's poetry for him. There was, at any rate, much trafficking between the Mount and the Nab; Hartley borrowed Mr. Wordsworth's books; and Mr. Wordsworth would often look in at the Nab of an afternoon; there would be long talks; and then the two would come out, arm-in-arm, and pace back to Rydal together.

The rustics might be wrong in the inferences they drew from the intimacy of the two men; but they were not wrong as to the fact. Much of the admiring, anxious, affectionate solicitude which Wordsworth had felt for S. T. Coleridge was bestowed on his not dissimilar son. And Wordsworth was to outlive the son as he had outlived the father, as he had outlived nearly all his contemporaries. Poor Hartley died in 1849, the year before Wordsworth's death. The rustics noticed that Mr. Wordsworth paid "lile Hartley" a daily visit while he lay on his deathbed, and they reported that he "took communion wi' him at the last." Wordsworth was not with him at the moment of his passing; but when he heard that he was gone, he said to Derwent Coleridge, his brother, "Let him lie by us—he would have wished it." And the next day the two men went to Grasmere churchyard, and a solemn little scene was transacted. Wordsworth bade the sexton measure out his own and his wife's grave, and then another, behind, for Hartley Coleridge. "When I lifted up my eyes from my daughter's grave," Wordsworth said, "he was standing there!" Then he turned to the sexton and said, "Keep the ground for us, we are old people, and it cannot be for long."

Harriet Martineau, who wrote harshly about both Wordsworth and Hartley Coleridge, wrote gently about the last of

Hartley. "I witnessed his funeral," she wrote, "and, as I saw his grey-headed old friend bending over his grave that winter morning, I felt that the aged mourner might well enjoy such support as could arise from a sense of duty faithfully performed to the being who was too weak for the conflicts of life." And again, "When nothing more than pity and help was possible, Wordsworth treated [Hartley] as gently as if he had been (what indeed he was in our eyes) a sick child."

The social side of Wordsworth's later years was chiefly determined by some strong friendships, and by certain felicities of neighbourhood, which brought the Arnolds to Fox How; Mrs. Fletcher and her family to Lancrigg; and Harriet Martineau to the outskirts of Ambleside. Then there were the many pilgrimages of admirers, and meetings, here and there, with younger men of letters.

Wordsworth was the worst of correspondents. He had always disliked the act of writing; and the frequent attacks of inflammation of the eyes from which he suffered, latterly with increasing frequency, added real disability to distaste. Yet to the very last he would not suffer any friendships to die for want of epistolary nutriment.

One of the most substantial of his later friendships was with William Rowan Hamilton, the great Irish mathematician, who invented "quaternions." Hamilton was one of those men of supreme mathematical genius who disprove the vulgar notion of the isolation of mathematics among the affairs of the mind and spirit. He loved poetry, and longed to be a poet. When he was young, he and his sister were constantly writing verses and sending them to Wordsworth for criticism. Wordsworth was by no means indifferent to mathematics. He was educated at a college pre-eminent in mathematics. All his readers know how, as he lay in bed in his rooms at John's, he could see much of Trinity, even—

> "The antechapel where the statue stood
> Of Newton with his prism and silent face,
> The marble index of a mind for ever
> Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone."

In another part of *The Prelude* he narrates how to him, in his student days, "poetry and geometric truth" seemed between

them to possess a monopoly of immortality and exemption from disease. Still, it was poetry rather than mathematics that Hamilton and Wordsworth conferred and corresponded about. They met first in September 1827, when Hamilton, aged twenty-two, was visiting the Lake country, and a very real friendship was cemented in spite of the inequality in age. The two men had a wonderful midnight walk in which—as Hamilton's biographer puts it — they "oscillated between Rydal and Ambleside, absorbed in converse on high themes, finding it almost impossible to part."

In 1829 Wordsworth visited the Hamiltons at Dunsink, to their great joy. Hamilton was now Irish Astronomer-Royal; and Wordsworth stayed at the Observatory. Mrs. Hamilton has recorded her impression. She "saw, approaching the house, a tall man, with grey hair, a brown coat, and nankeen trousers," looking as unlike her preconceptions as possible—

> "And is *this* Wordsworth? *this* the man
> Of whom my fancy cherished,
> So faithfully a waking dream
> An image that hath perished."

So she parodied inwardly, as she watched her realized ideal at lunch. She saw, in the first place, great reserve; then she saw rusticity, simplicity, and dignity; none of which qualities, apparently, had formed part of her conventional idea of a poet. And she added what we can well believe to show deep insight: *other men did not seem necessary to him.* His intellectual and moral loftiness struck her so much that she could no longer think any of his poetry "silly." What she had thought silliness was but the stooping of a great nature, to which nothing was common or unclean. He seemed to her "sublime"; and, when he was still only fifty-nine, "a divine *old* man."

Next year Hamilton stayed three weeks at Rydal Mount; and correspondence, about poetry, science, and politics, went on at intervals throughout the poet's life. There was an interesting time in 1844, when Hamilton was staying with R. P. Graves at Windermere, another guest being Archer Butler. Julius Hare was staying at Fox How; and Graves had Wordsworth, Hare, and Edward Quillinan to meet Hamilton and Butler. Before he left the Lakes on that occasion, Hamilton celebrated

his relations with Wordsworth by writing an impromptu sonnet in Dora's album at Rydal Mount, in which he described the change from the "unquiet transport" of a mere disciple to the "calmer joy" of a friend. In 1846, through Hamilton's influence, Wordsworth was made an Honorary Member of the Royal Irish Academy.

Another stimulating and enlarging correspondence was with the American Henry Reed, Professor at Philadelphia, though the two men never saw each other in the flesh. Reed was Wordsworth's American editor, and they corresponded much on international copyright and other themes. It was a good thing for so insular an Englishman as Wordsworth to have a transatlantic correspondent. There was not much in the "Great Republic" to attract one who believed that the English Constitution, before the Whigs began to desecrate it, was perfect; but Wordsworth did admit to Reed that he had as little or less faith in absolute despotism. Nay, in 1843, he did not "conceal that, as far as the people are capable of governing themselves, he was a Democrat."

In the last summer of his life Wordsworth received a friend of the Professor, Mr. Ellis Yarnall, of Philadelphia, who has left a record of his impressions. He walked from Ambleside to the Mount, feeling, much as De Quincey had felt in 1807, that "after long years of waiting, of distant reverential admiration and love," he was about to see a man who had so thrilled him across the ocean with the power of his words. He arrived at the early dinner-hour, and Wordsworth left the table to receive him at the door. "It could be no other—a tall figure, a little bent with age, his hair thin and grey, and his face deeply wrinkled. The expression of his countenance was sad, mournful I might say; he seemed one on whom sorrow pressed heavily." He insisted that Mr. Yarnall should join them at their meal in the little dining-room; Mrs. Wordsworth was there, with three grandchildren. They talked of American affairs; Mrs. Wordsworth going on with her knitting after dinner. It was the year of the Californian gold-fever; but Mr. Yarnall was tactful enough to speak of American progress only in so far as it meant an extension of the English tongue. Wordsworth looked up at this, with "a fixing of his eye as if on some remote object," and remarked that it behoved those who wrote to see to it, that

what they uttered was on the side of virtue. Of Henry VIII. he spoke to his guest with positive loathing. The subsequent conversation ranged widely. They spoke of France, just through the '48 upheaval. He recalled his youth there among the scenes of the great Revolution, and said, "I should like to spend another month in France before I close my eyes." They spoke of *Modern Painters*, the two first volumes of which were now before the world. Wordsworth thought Ruskin a brilliant writer, but regretted his too exclusive partisanship of Turner. They spoke of the "Oxford Movement," which had by this time more than run its early course. Wordsworth registered his definite approval. "I foresaw," said he, "that the movement was for good, and such I conceive it has been beyond all question."

Mr. Yarnall noticed the quality of Wordsworth's talk; how choice his words were; how faultless seemed each sentence. When he was with him in the open air, he marked, as others did, the poet's habit of stopping frequently to emphasize something he was saying, and again and again he saw the far-away look in the eyes, and the fire of genius unquenched by nearly eighty years. Wordsworth was evidently feeling his age; he wistfully asked what age men reached in America? They went to see the Rydal waterfall before they parted on the Ambleside road. As they walked, Wordsworth gave to a beggar—the fifth or sixth, he said, to whom he had given that day. Mr. Yarnall left him, he reported to Reed, "in a tumult of excitement." He felt that a great man, great morally, and great intellectually, had passed from his sight—a man who seemed "living as if in the presence of God by habitual recollection."

As early as 1841, Wordsworth was introduced to Emerson's writings, but they had no message for him. He could not away with the style, and wrote sarcastically to Reed about "a language which he (Emerson) supposed to be English." Yet Emerson had made a pious pilgrimage to Rydal in 1833, and had a long talk with Wordsworth, in which apparently there was not much love lost. Emerson's *animus* is very different from Mr. Yarnall's. He described Wordsworth as "a plain, elderly, white-haired man, not prepossessing, and disfigured by green goggles, called in by his daughters [*sic*]." The bulk of the conversation naturally was on American affairs; and though

Emerson only reports Wordsworth's remarks, he does so with a scornful *innuendo* which cannot be mistaken. Wordsworth, unfortunately, took the lead in transatlantic criticism; and (it was the year after the Reform Bill) was in his most dolefully didactic vein. In his literary criticism, as Emerson reports him, he did not get beyond wooden platitudes, and denunciations born of imperfect knowledge and insight. He thought Carlyle, though clever and deep, sometimes insane. He was so disgusted with the first part of *Wilhelm Meister* that he threw the book across the room. He had always wished that Mr. Coleridge would write more to be understood, etc. Emerson admitted Wordsworth's kindness and courtesy, his truthfulness and modesty. But he found "hard limits" to his thought; he "made the impression of a narrow and very English mind; of one who paid for his rare elevation by general tameness and conformity." One may resent the *animus* of all this; but one recognizes the truth in it.

The fact is that Emerson and Wordsworth stood too near each other, and yet had too sharp differences of method and medium to realize their spiritual kinship. Carlyle, who was wanting in Emerson's suavity and tolerance, was even more inappreciative of Wordsworth. Wordsworth thought of Carlyle as merely a clever and rather dangerous man who did not know how to write English. Carlyle thought of Wordsworth as an overpraised literary lion with a very feeble roar. He saw him occasionally in London, early in the 'forties, when the poet's living reputation was at its highest; and he recalled his memories in the miserable early days of his widowerhood, when the heavens above him were as brass, and all his life seemed vanity and a striving after wind. What he has to say of Wordsworth is unsympathetic, and therefore, in a sense, valueless as criticism; yet the shrewdness of his insight and his inimitable power of expression give it the value of partial truth. Even the most reverent Wordsworthian may allow himself the sly enjoyment of this: "A man recognizably of strong intellectual powers, strong character; given to meditation, and much contemptuous of the unmeditative world and its noisy nothingnesses; had a fine limpid style of writing and delineating, in his small way; a fine limpid vein of melody too in him (as of an honest rustic fiddle, good, and well handled,

but wanting two or more of the strings, and not capable of much!)" Or even this: "To my private self his divine reflections and unfathomabilities seemed stinted, scanty, palish, and uncertain . . . and I reckoned his poetic storehouse to be far from an opulent or well-furnished apartment!"

Carlyle remembered best a literary breakfast in St. James's Street in or about 1840, given by Henry Taylor, at which he found himself in Wordsworth's company. James Spedding was another of the guests. Wordsworth talked much, and more, apparently, about the mechanism of verbal expression than Carlyle cared for. Carlyle's sketch of his appearance and utterance ought to be given at first hand. "His voice was good, frank, and sonorous, though practically clear, distinct, and forcible, rather than melodious; the tone of him businesslike, sedately confident; no discourtesy, yet no anxiety about being courteous. A fine wholesome rusticity, fresh as his mountain breezes, sat well on the stalwart veteran. You would have said he was a usually taciturn man. . . . His face bore marks of much, not always peaceful, meditation; the look of it, not bland or benevolent, so much as close, impregnable and hard; a man *multa tacere loquive paratus*, in a world where he had experienced no lack of contradiction, as he strode along! The eyes were not very brilliant, but they had a quiet clearness; there was enough of brow, and well shaped; rather too much cheek . . . face of squarish shape and decidedly longish, as I think the head itself was (its 'length' going horizontal); he was large boned, lean, but still firm-knit, tall, and strong-looking when he stood, a right good steel-grey figure, with rustic simplicity and dignity about him, and a vivacious strength looking through him."

Carlyle and Wordsworth had several other meetings. At one of them they talked of the French Revolution; and Carlyle was interested in Wordsworth's personal experiences of it. On another occasion they talked of English poetry; but from this conversation Carlyle carried off no idea save of Wordsworth's literary self-esteem. What he liked best in the poet was his vigorous word-painting of famous men he had known in early days. "Never, or never but once, had I seen a stronger intellect, a more luminous and veracious power of insight, directed upon such a survey of fellow-men and their contemporary journey through the world."

The two men evidently neither loved nor understood one another; what was *wesentlich* in each was, on the whole, hidden from the other. Yet, in the play of *Hamlet*, there is much besides the character of Hamlet that is interesting and important, and Carlyle's hard unsympathetic flashes on Wordsworth's accidents are not without some value in helping us to understand his essence. Let us leave this phase with one little picture, by no means rich in significance, and yet called by Carlyle, "symbolical of all." Carlyle and Wordsworth were dining in company somewhere in London, while Wordsworth was a lion there. "Dinner was large, luminous, sumptuous; I sat a long way from Wordsworth; dessert, I think, had come in, and certainly there reigned in all quarters a cackle as of Babel (only politer, perhaps), which far up in Wordsworth's quarter (who was leftward on my side of the table) seemed to have taken a sententious, rather louder, logical and quasi-scientific turn, heartily unimportant to gods and men, so far as I could judge of it and of the other babble reigning. I looked upwards, leftwards, the coast being luckily for a moment clear; there, far off, beautifully screened in the shadow of his vertical green circle * (which was on the further side of him, sat Wordsworth, silent, slowly but steadily gnawing some portion of what I conceived to be raisins, with his eye and attention placidly fixed on these and these alone. The sight of whom and of his rock-like indifference to the babble, quasi-scientific and other, with attention turned on the small practical alone, was comfortable and amusing to me, who felt like him, but could not eat raisins."

Wordsworth and Walter Savage Landor met for the first time in the summer of 1832, at Moresby, but they had corresponded previously. Wordsworth passed a day on the banks of Wast Water in Landor's company, and evidently liked the man. He thought him original and learned as well as modest; and he enjoyed his hearty laughter. Landor was Southey's friend; and Southey kept him in Italy *au courant* of Wordsworth's work in poetry. Landor cordially, though critically, admired Wordsworth. "The first poet that ever wrote," he once said, "was not a more original poet than he is, and the best is hardly a greater." Wordsworth, in his turn, said that he would rather

* Carlyle noticed that Wordsworth, for the relief of his poor eyes, carried a circular green shade, which could be unfolded and stuck in a stand.

have written some of Landor's verses than any poetry produced in his time ; and he greatly admired the *Imaginary Conversations*, when they began to come out in 1824. They met again in 1836, in London ; and this time, unhappily, things went wrong. Wordsworth went to London in May, to see his friends and to see Talfourd's play *Ion*, with Macready in it, about which there was a flutter of expectation in literary circles. The first performance was at Covent Garden ; and the first-night audience included Wordsworth, Crabb Robinson, Joanna Baillie, and Landor. When Wordsworth appeared in a box, with his green spectacles on, the audience cheered him. He shook hands with Joanna Baillie in the adjoining box; took off his spectacles, and looked round the house, nodding to those he recognized. He seemed sad, and as if smiling were difficult. However, he sat patiently through the long play, thumping applause from time to time with his stick.

It was at Talfourd's house that Wordsworth and Landor met ; and Landor resented Wordsworth's tone about his friend Southey. He thought, too, that Wordsworth's dislike of Goethe was due to jealousy, and not to mere misconception. He was vehement and impulsive, and he turned on Wordsworth, satirizing him, and even stooping so low as to parody *We are Seven*. Crabb Robinson, who lamented Wordsworth's insensibility to the merit of such great foreigners as Goethe and Voltaire, but knew that it came from nothing worse than a wooden John Bullishness of mind, remonstrated with Landor, but to no purpose. The friendship was blighted. In December, 1842, Landor attacked Wordsworth in *Blackwood* in an Imaginary Conversation between Porson and Southey ; and in April, 1843, Edward Quillinan rushed in, in Wordsworth's defence, with an Imaginary Conversation between Landor and Christopher North. Wordsworth disapproved of his championship, chiefly because he thought Landor beneath notice. He characterized him in language unusually strong for him. "His character," he wrote to Rowan Hamilton, "may be given in two or three words—a madman, a bad man, yet a man of genius, as many a madman is."

Crabb Robinson himself was one of the best friends, as friends, that Wordsworth ever had. He was intensely appreciative, and yet perfectly aware of the poet's limitations, and not

afraid to point them out to him, when he thought them discreditable. He was much in Wordsworth's company, not only in London when the poet chanced to be there, but many times at Rydal, and during the continental tour in 1837. Robinson spent the Christmas season of 1835 at Rydal in a cottage just below the Mount. He arrived early on Christmas Day, to find a comfortable fire burning in his lodgings, and tea and sugar provided by the housewifely hands of Mrs. Wordsworth. It was always at the same season that he paid his subsequent visits. Mrs. Wordsworth valued his buoyant spirits as a stimulant for her husband in the dark days; but Robinson insisted on being in lodgings, that he might have his breakfast and milk supper under an independent roof. These winter visits became an institution, and the lively barrister was looked on as one of the family at Rydal Mount. "*No Crabb, no Christmas!*" Edward Quillinan used to say. We have no pleasanter picture of those days of afterglow than that which the diarist has sketched for us. The Arnolds, let us remember, were at Fox How; Dr. Arnold was in his full vigour. Robinson would read in bed of a morning, and occupy himself indoors until it was time to go to the Mount for the one-o'clock dinner. Or there might be quite a long walk with Wordsworth before dinner, and in the dusk of the afternoon a stroll to Ambleside for the newspaper. On Sunday, Dr. Arnold would preach; or at least they would meet him after church, and there might be deep theological talks. How wholesome for Wordsworth, in those days of his conservative despair, to have to encounter, in the frosty or rainy weather, the nimble Whig wits of Arnold of Rugby and Crabb Robinson, both of whom were perfectly reverent, but neither of whom, we may be sure, would give the poet any dialectic handicap! The Doctor would attack Milton's Satan as not wicked enough; and Wordsworth, as they trudged along, would point out the cunning of the art in *Paradise Regained;* would tell once more the story of the *genesis* of the *Ancient Mariner;* or would discourse on the significance of the sonnet. Wordsworth would tell Dr. Arnold how Robinson helped him through the winter; and Robinson would climb into the coach, after his six weeks' stay, with a heart full of tenderness and regret.

In those days of the 'thirties, before Dora's marriage, and

FOX HOW

while Wordsworth's public fame was ripening, the nearness of the Arnolds was a great enrichment of the Rydal Mount life. Fox How, under Loughrigg, turning its back on the sun, but with its face to the mountains between Wansfell and Fairfield, to which the Arnolds came in 1833, was closely associated with Wordsworth from the beginning. The poet gave his help in the formalities of the purchase ; he advised as to the building of the new house ; he directed the laying out of the delightful grounds. He was especially insistent about the chimneys ; like his own at Rydal, they must have some colour, a bit of red and a bit of yellow ; and they must be partly square and partly round. The builders remembered how "Wudsworth" and the Doctor would argue about this matter.

The rustics remembered also that Wordsworth and Dr. Arnold were "ter'ble friends ;" but the records of their actual intercourse are not very abundant. There must, of course, have been antagonism ; for there was not only the Doctor's Whiggism, but his impassioned distrust of that Anglican Revival with which Wordsworth was more and more inclined to sympathize. On the other hand, Wordsworth would like Arnold's sturdy Protestantism ; and—but why should one try to explain the intimacy of two great men, however divergent, in any respects, they might be? Great educators, great Christians, great Englishmen, could they meet day by day "in the silent woody places," and among the perpetual hills, far from the din of controversy, and not rush together in the great communions of thought and feeling? Strange that Wordsworth had to outlive so long the eager reformer young enough to be his son! In June, 1842, there dawned at Rugby the summer morning when Arnold heard the sudden call—

> "Thou arosest to tread
> In the summer morning, the road
> Of death, at a call unforeseen."

Much less comfort was in the proximity of Harriet Martineau. Between her and Wordsworth there was indeed a potential antagonism which it would have been hard to transcend. Logical, materialistic, utilitarian, she gave her talents to causes which were far removed from Wordsworth's ideals. Moreover, she had an acrid tongue, and an eye quick to see weaknesses and blemishes.

She came to Ambleside in the spring of 1845 resolved to make it her home; and, within a year, had bought land about a mile from the town on the Rydal road, and built herself a house, which she called "The Knoll." She came with the defiant self-consciousness of heterodoxy, foreseeing that provincial respectability would frown upon her, and resolved to have as few dealings with it as possible. The *éclaircissement* of her heresies was delayed until 1851, when Wordsworth had passed beyond time; and he received the new-comer graciously. After his fashion, he gave practical help in the laying out of her little domain. He threw himself down among the hazel bushes on the site of the future house, and discussed architectural points with her. When she began farming her two acres, he came to see her first calf. As a great man, he had, of course, to plant a tree; and she remembered his workmanlike way of doing it, and how he washed his hands afterwards in the watering-pot. He washed them that he might give them both to her, and wish her many happy years in her new home. "Then," the acrid lady goes on to tell us, "he proceeded to give me a piece of friendly advice. He told me I should find visitors a great expense, and that I must promise him (and he laid his hand on my arm, to enforce what he said) I must promise him to do as he and his sister had done, when, in their early days, they had lived at Grasmere. 'When you have a visitor,' said he, 'you must say: if you like to have a cup of tea with us, you are very welcome; but, if you want any meat, you must pay for your board. Now promise me that you will do this.'"

As Dorothea, in *Middlemarch*, remarked to her sister, it is only certain people who see the moles on a hero's face, and Miss Martineau was one of them. But the moles are generally there; and perhaps it is well, in the interests of realism, that there is always somebody disagreeable enough to notice them. Miss Martineau was struck by the combination of extreme economy and generosity displayed by the Wordsworths. One could hardly get a drop of cream with one's tea at Rydal Mount, and yet Wordsworth would outrage political economy by giving away his milk to cottagers who were quite able to buy it for themselves. Miss Martineau's visits to the Mount were few, though she was always welcome there. In fact, she says that she went only twice. She kept young servants, and was afraid

to leave them even for a few hours. She had no carriage; and it was a mile and a half from The Knoll to Rydal Mount. But they often met in the open air; and it was a pleasure to the clever deaf woman to see the poet on a winter's day in "his cloak, Scotch bonnet and green goggles." Unlike some other observers, she reports him as evidently popular among children. Half a score of them would accompany him on the road—one "pulling at his cloak, or holding by his trousers"—while he would cut switches out of the hedge for them. He would indulge in a little heavy fatherly *badinage* at her expense. He would rally her on her walking-powers, though he ought to have known that she was no walker. Meeting her one day with her collaborator Atkinson, "'There, there!'" said he, laying his hand on Atkinson's arm. "'Take care! take care! Don't let *her* carry you about. She is killing off half the gentlemen in the county!'"

She noticed the change wrought on Wordsworth by his daughter's death, and thought him somewhat selfish in his grief. His wife's personality attracted her more than his own. "Her excellent sense and her womanly devotedness (especially when she grew pale and shrunk and dim-eyed under her mute sorrow for the daughter whom *he* mourned aloud) made her by far the more interesting of the two to me."

A charming family lived at Lancrigg in Easedale in those days. A certain Archibald Fletcher, a Scottish Advocate of very advanced reforming views, who died in 1828, had married Eliza Dawson, a delightful woman of refined tastes and literary gifts. Some years after her husband's death, Mrs. Fletcher came often to the Lake country with her children. The first visit was in the summer of 1833, while Fox How was building, and the Arnolds were temporarily occupying Wordsworth's old house, Allan Bank. The Fletchers had lodgings in a farmhouse in Easedale, close to Lancrigg, which was to be their future home. It was a sad summer to Wordsworth, because it was then that Dorothy's illness became pronounced; but he always brightened up when he walked over into Easedale and saw the old views and the new friends. Both Mrs. Fletcher and her daughters, Mary and Margaret, who afterwards married respectively Sir John Richardson and Dr. John Davy, younger brother of Sir Humphry, have left memorials of their impressions of

Wordsworth. As he had acted for the Arnolds about Fox How, so he did for the Fletchers about Lancrigg. In 1840 they settled in, and for the next ten years were much to Wordsworth. He loved his visits to Lancrigg, and all he did and said was seen and heard by eyes and ears of love, not of mere gossippy intelligence. There were many meetings and many walks, of which the reminiscences fill up and round off our idea of the poet. This, for instance, of the shortest day of 1843: "Wordsworth and Miss Fenwick came early, and although it was misty and dingy, he proposed to walk up Easedale. . . . He said on the terrace, 'This is a striking anniversary to me; for this day forty-four years ago, my sister and I took up our abode at Grasmere, and three days after we found out this walk, which long remained our favourite haunt.' There is always something very touching in his way of speaking of his sister; the tones of his voice become more gentle and solemn, and he ceases to have that flow of expression which is so remarkable in him on all other subjects. It is as if the sadness connected with her present condition was too much for him to dwell upon in connection with the past, though habit and the 'omnipotence of circumstance' have made its daily presence less oppressive to his spirits. He said that his sister spoke constantly of their early days, but more of the years they spent together in other parts of England than those at Grasmere." Here again is a little picture which tells us something. On January 22, 1844, Mrs. Fletcher's grandson Henry was starting for Oxford. "His young cousins and I," writes Mrs. Davy, "went down with him to wait for the mail in the market-place [of Ambleside]. We found Mr. Wordsworth walking about before the post-office door, in very charming mood. His spirits were excited by the bright morning sunshine, and he entered at once on a full flow of discourse. He looked very benevolently on Henry, as he mounted on the top of the coach, and seemed quite disposed to give an old man's blessing to the young man entering on an untried field, and then (nowise interrupted by the hurrying to and fro of ostlers with their smoking horses, or passengers with their carpet bags) he launched into a dissertation . . . on the subject of college habits, and of his utter distrust of all attempts to nurse virtue by an avoidance of temptation. He expressed also his entire want of confidence (from experience, he said) of

highly-wrought religious expression in youth. The safest training for the mind in religion he considered to be a contemplating of the character and personal history of Christ. 'Work it,' he said, 'into your thoughts, into your imagination, make it a real presence in the mind.'"

There was a great celebration of the poet's seventy-fourth birthday at Rydal Mount on April 9, 1844. Lady Richardson wrote of the tables spread in front of the house, and of a concourse of Grasmere boys and girls, "Their eyes fixed with wonder and admiration on the tables covered with oranges, gingerbread, and painted eggs, ornamented with daffodils, laurels, and moss, gracefully intermixed." She tells how the children played hide-and-seek among the shrubs, and how pleased the old man was with it all.

Besides the Lancrigg ladies, one other woman held an intimate place in the Wordsworth circle in the latter days. Henry Taylor, author of *Philip van Artevelde*, and famous for his splendid looks, had a connection—a cousin of his stepmother—called Isabella Fenwick. She was much older than Taylor, being, in fact, only about twelve years younger than Wordsworth. She was a very remarkable woman; fine-looking, strong-minded, deeply religious, and yet—what deeply religious women and men sometimes fail to be—well versed in varieties of human nature, and therefore humorous, charitable, and free of spirit. She was much of an educator, much of a hero-worshipper. Over Henry Taylor, as long as he was unmarried, she had much influence, and loved to exercise it. When he married, Miss Fenwick transferred herself to Wordsworth. Taylor, who had known Wordsworth for many years, kindled the lady's interest in him. In 1830 she was at Rydal Mount for the first time. In the 'thirties Miss Fenwick had a house in London, and Wordsworth stayed with her on his way to the Continent in 1837. Next year she settled at Ambleside, and began to feed herself on Wordsworthian air. In 1838 she was writing enthusiastically to Henry Taylor about her intercourse with the poet, and he was reading *The Prelude* (which he was then revising) to her. Crabb Robinson reported that Wordsworth talked well to her and that she understood him. She regarded him with that intensity of interest and that depth of insight which only a woman feels and exercises. "What strange

workings," she wrote to Taylor, "there are in his great mind, and how fearfully strong are all his feelings and affections! If his intellect had been less powerful, they would have destroyed him long ago; but even in the midst of his strongest emotions, his attention may be attracted to more intellectual speculation, or his imagination excited by some of those external objects which have such influence over him; and his feelings subside, like the feelings of a child." Soon she became so closely knit to the Wordsworths (Mrs. Wordsworth loved her enthusiastically) that—about the end of 1840—she went to live at Rydal Mount; and was an almost constant inmate for many years. "I would be content to be a servant in the house," she wrote, "to hear his wisdom." Her presence was of especial value when Dora went away to be married, in 1841. Wordsworth dictated to Miss Fenwick those precious bibliographical notes, prefixed, in all good editions, to his poems. In such intimacy it was inevitable that a shrewd observer like Miss Fenwick should be critical of her hero; and critical she was. She chafed sometimes under his self-esteem; she thought some of his moods unworthy. But she was faithful unto death; and much of the light and strength of the home-life at Rydal in that last decade came from her. She died in 1851.

The Laureateship, pressed, as we have seen, on Wordsworth's reluctance, set a seal to his public estimation. But the last years,

> "Placid in their going
> To a lingering motion bound,"

yet moving at times through dark waters, have that privacy, that domestic inwardness, which marked the whole of Wordsworth's life. What he was, rather than what the world thought of him; the light he gave rather than the rewards he received; the sound of his voice without the reverberations of fame—these are what matter most in our estimate. From this point of view, his death was in perfect keeping with his life. In fulness of days, surrounded by the love and reverence of a perfect home, the strong man yielded without a struggle to the Power that was stronger than he. It was the spring of 1850; on April 7 he would be eighty years old. On Sunday, March 10, he was at Rydal chapel for the last time. Spring winds bear

THE GRAVES

hardly on the aged: on that very Sunday, he looked feeble in a cold walk to Grasmere with his sister-in-law and Edward Quillinan. For a day or two he went about still, calling on Mrs. Arnold, calling on Quillinan. But deadly shafts were flying; and on March 14 he was pierced. He had sat too long the evening before, on a cottage bench near White-moss, looking at the sunset. Pleurisy came on; and for more than a month he lay with ebbing life. His wife was with him, and his eldest son; Quillinan was constant in love and care; Dorothy, with clouded mind, was there to love him still. On April 23—the day of Shakespeare's birth and death, as some have loved to note—as his cuckoo-clock was striking noon, he passed into the immortal. Some of his friends, looking on his dead face, were struck by its resemblance to Dante's, others by the look of his sister. Dorothy was being drawn about, as usual, in her chair. As she passed his door they heard her say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" She survived him five years.

The funeral was of the simplest and most private kind. Wordsworth had put on record his wish to be carried to the grave Westmorland-wise, on the shoulders of his humble neighbours, but this did not happen. The procession by the two lakes was of the ordinary kind. Grasmere church was filled, but not by the peasants, whom Wordsworth had so idealized. They never understood him.

Mrs. Wordsworth was able to be there, supported by her two sons, her figure bowed by grief. Yet she did not faint, as they thought she might. She bore up calmly, and was able to appear among the mourners at Rydal Mount later in the day. Nine years after she was laid in the same grave.

Many a pilgrim has visited, and will visit, the group of kindred graves near the east end of the church, the Rothay murmuring below. The one of chief interest is marked by the plainest of stones with the inscription, *William Wordsworth*, 1850; and below it, *Mary Wordsworth*, 1859.

Such simplicity is more than an accident, or even a symbol. It is a vital part of the noblest genius ever devoted to showing the depth that underlies the common, the majesty that is in the humble. Wordsworth's life and poetry alike were without pomp and circumstance, and so is his grave. Towards the close of his

life he said that his chief aspiration was to fulfil the beatitude, *Blessed are the poor in spirit.* If this is not the legend which we would add to his name, there is another of which none will dispute the fitness: *Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called children of God.*

CHAPTER XIV

FAME

WE have seen enough, in the course of our journey with Wordsworth, to show us in what various esteem his work was held during his lifetime, and how long he had to learn to win his soul in the patience of unpopularity. More than half a century after his death, we are in a position to make some estimate of the curves of his reputation, and to conjecture his ultimate place among English poets.

On the whole, the history of Wordsworth's fame has been that of a steady advance from contempt to honour—honour which seems ever on the increase. But in his reputation in Britain alone the story has to take note of many phases and eddies.

Lyrical Ballads was a challenge ; an enterprise conscious of its own novelty and daring ; and in *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth was the predominant partner. In the minds of two young men who were to become considerable critics, in De Quincey and John Wilson, he found, as we have seen, immediate enthusiastic sympathy, though, in the case of Wilson, it was not the sympathy of unmixed approval. Still, it was discipleship ; the kind of appreciation which an innovator would give a great deal to win. It did not, however, represent accurately any large section of critical opinion about Wordsworth.

During at least the first quarter of the nineteeth century, Wordsworth entirely failed to win popularity among the general poetry-reading and poetry-buying public. This was the more disappointing that in those days there was a relatively much larger poetry-reading public than there is in these, when novels and plays engage so much superficial literary interest. But at popularity of this kind Wordsworth did not aim, and he was

not in the least embittered by the want of it. He knew that he could not compete in the market with the sumptuousness and glitter of his contemporaries, with the attractiveness of Scott and Byron and even of Southey; and, though he thought amiss and too lowly of that rival work, he was justified in the serenity of his self-esteem, and his content to work for the future and the few. But, though the public was heedless, the narrower critical world was stirred from the outset, and three movements are distinguishable.

First in time, and making most noise, came the stir of unsympathetic criticism, typically represented by Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review*. It is a mistake to regard this criticism as wholly unfavourable, or to think of Jeffrey as stamping a clumsy and brutal heel on the fine flowers of romantic poetry. Jeffrey was an accomplished critic and a discriminating one; his dealings with Scott, Byron, and Keats make it quite evident that he could appraise them nearly as well as his most "superior" successors; his appreciation of the Elizabethans was as strong, if not as delicate and inward, as that of Charles Lamb. But he was essentially a critical pedagogue of the old-fashioned type; he seemed to be half-scolding his charge even when he commended them, and when he conceived it to be his duty to punish, he showed little mercy. With the instincts of the schoolmaster he combined those of the partisan and the journalist; he believed in the "reality" of classes and "schools" as many mediæval thinkers believed in the "reality" of general ideas; and he knew that only opinions served up hot and strong avail to sell a periodical. He by no means denied all merit to Wordsworth, but he put Wordsworth into a "Lake School," and against that School he took sides; against it he fought like a Trojan. He admitted, for example, that *Lyrical Ballads* "were deservedly popular" (only a hostile eye, by the way, could have detected their popularity); "they were undoubtedly characterized by a strong spirit of originality, of pathos, and natural feeling." In *The Excursion* he found pathos, eloquence, tenderness, sweetness, and other good things. But he was convinced that the essential importance of Wordsworth lay in his supposed membership of the supposed Lake brotherhood,—a brotherhood of literary heretics and dissenters, partly of German and partly of Rousseau-ish origin; a sect which the *Edinburgh*

was bound to suppress in the name of literary catholicity, orthodoxy, and apostolical succession.

In proceeding from this starting-point, Jeffrey's criticism of Wordsworth broke down. The start was a false one. Wordsworth belonged to no brotherhood, no party; even in the first issue of *Lyrical Ballads* he was working for his own hand; with Coleridge he hardly co-operated. And though there are interesting affinities between some of Rousseau's thought and some of Wordsworth's, it is absurd to maintain that Wordsworth derived from Rousseau, or was in any sense a propagandist of his doctrines. Failing to understand Wordsworth's solitariness and originality, Jeffrey failed to understand him at all, and his blame and his praise were alike nearly worthless. By the time 1807 was reached, Wordsworth had published much which easily lent itself to smart journalistic ridicule, and helped to accumulate the discredit of the imaginary "Lakers." Jeffrey lived under the constant sense of a kind of conspiracy among the mountains: the new poets, he seemed to believe, haunted them like a nest of brigands. *They* were affected; *they* were exaggerated; *they* were silly; *they* were revolutionary; and they hung together for the purpose of sowing affectation, exaggeration, silliness, and social discontent broadcast.

Fortified by this theory, Jeffrey had an easy task with Wordsworth's poetry in detail. By this time he ought to have discovered that Wordsworth, whatever his faults, was not only a good poet, but a great one; but he never made that discovery at all. He believed that in his simplicity Wordsworth was imitating Ambrose Philips; and so it was obvious to call the lines to *The Small Celandine* "namby-pamby." As to *Alice Fell:* "if the printing of such trash be not felt as an insult to the public taste, we are afraid it cannot be insulted." He seemed to be stooping to uproot a noxious weed when, speaking of *Resolution and Independence* in words which, with an opposite innuendo, would be an excellent criticism, he defied "the bitterest enemy of Mr. Wordsworth to produce anything at all parallel from any collection of English poetry, or even from the specimens of his friend Mr. Southey." The Lake School were tedious and affected, and so was *Yarrow Unvisited.* The Lake School were always imitating somebody; and in his sonnets Wordsworth was at his best, because in them he was imitating,

not Quarles, Ambrose Philips, Cowper, Schiller, or Kotzebue, but Milton.

But there was a deeper depth waiting for poor Jeffrey. One does not expect an eminent journalist to be constitutionally a philosopher; and there never was less of a philosopher than the bright, trenchant Whig lawyer into whose hands Wordsworth fell. Jeffrey had an uncomfortable feeling from the beginning that Wordsworth's poetry was philosophic, and the feeling was much strengthened by *The Excursion* and *The White Doe of Rylstone*. The feeling took shape in the conclusion that Wordsworth was, or pretended to be, a "mystic;" it was one of the sins of the Lakers, learned from Germany, to darken with mysticism the clear British air. (At a later stage Carlyle gave Jeffrey much trouble by the same propensity.) Mysticism, therefore, must be got rid of thoroughly. It is perceptible in the *Ode to Duty*, and of that *Ode* we accordingly say, in our best style, that in it "the lofty view is very unsuccessfully attempted," and concerning two lines in particular—

> "Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
> And the most ancient Heavens, through thee, are fresh and strong"—

that they "seem to be utterly without meaning; at least, we have no sort of conception in what sense *Duty* can be said to keep the old skies *fresh*, and the stars from wrong." The *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* has its venom so concentrated that it may be killed by one jingling phrase: "it is the most illegible and unintelligible part of the publication."

In pursuing this method with *The White Doe*, Jeffrey had a leg to stand on. There is certainly mysticism in it, and it is mysticism which does leave the reader somewhat perplexed and unsatisfied. It is a little difficult, when one has finished it, to be sure what it is all about, and why things in it happen as they do. It is an ambitious and self-conscious poem. Wordsworth meant to do, and felt that he was doing, something specially remarkable in it; and perhaps in proportion to this ambition and self-consciousness, it is not a complete success. But at least it is a beautiful poem; beautiful in its melody and pathos; beautiful in its suggestiveness and tender treatment of the tie between man and the humbler creatures. But Jeffrey saw nothing of the beauty; it seemed to him "to consist of a happy

union of all the faults, without any of the beauties, which belong to [Mr. Wordsworth's] school of poetry." In his best journalese the critic explained that when he first took it up he thought it was a parody, but that he had not gone far till he felt "intimately" that "nothing in the nature of a joke could be so insupportably dull." In *Lyrical Ballads* the poet was exhibited on the whole "in a vein of very pretty deliration;" in *The White Doe* he appears "in a state of low and maudlin imbecility." And so on. Enough of this phase of Wordsworthian criticism.

Another phase is centrally represented by Hazlitt. We may perhaps label it superior critical approval, with the word "superior" in inverted commas. It stands midway between the unsympathetic and uncomprehending treatment of Jeffrey, and the enlightened critical sympathy which makes the third phase of the period. Like Jeffrey, Hazlitt loved to lecture the people he was criticizing; he had much of Jeffrey's cocksureness and partisanship. Like Jeffrey, too, he was a journalist, and a yet more eminent one than Jeffrey; after Defoe, Hazlitt is perhaps the most distinguished journalist, pure and simple, of pre-Victorian times. Like the journalism which Defoe did so much to found—that of Queen Anne's reign—the journalism of the teens of the nineteenth century was half literary and half political; and Hazlitt, its most brilliant ornament, made ample use of the double inspiration. He was a liberal when Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey had become conservative, and this antagonism made his literary epigrams sting like whips. Nothing, certainly, in that kind could be better than some of Hazlitt's *dicta*. What more, for instance, could Coleridge's worst enemy desire for him than such treatment as this: "He is equally averse to the prejudices of the vulgar, the paradoxes of the learned, or the habitual convictions of his own mind. He moves in an unaccountable diagonal between truth and falsehood, sense and nonsense, sophistry and commonplace, and only assents to any opinion when he knows that all the reasons are against it. A matter of fact is abhorrent to his nature; the very *air* of truth repels him. He is only saved from the extremities of absurdity by combining them all in his own person. Two things are indispensable to him—to set out from no premises and to arrive at no conclusion. The consciousness

of a single certainty would be an insupportable weight upon his mind."

The hand that could thus castigate Coleridge, would not, we might expect, spare Wordsworth. Nor did it, when Hazlitt was playing the journalist rather than the literary critic proper. Here is Jeffrey's method reproduced in perfection. "The spirit of Jacobin poetry is rank egotism. We know an instance. It is of a person who founded a school of poetry on sheer humanity, on idiot boys, and mad mothers, and on Simon Lee, the old huntsman. The secret of the Jacobin poetry and the anti-Jacobin politics of this writer is the same. His lyrical poetry was a cant of humanity about the commonest people, to level the great with the small; and his political poetry is a cant of loyalty to level Bonaparte with kings and hereditary imbecility. . . . This person admires nothing that is admirable, feels no interest in anything interesting, no grandeur in anything grand, no beauty in anything beautiful. He tolerates nothing but what he himself creates; he sympathizes only with what can enter into no competition with him, 'with the bare earth and mountain bare, and grass in the green field.' He sees nothing but himself and the universe. He hates all greatness, and all pretensions to it but his own. His egotism is, in this respect, a madness; for he scorns even the admiration of himself, thinking it a presumption in any one to suppose that he has taste or sense enough to understand him. He hates all science and all art . . . he hates prose, he hates all poetry but his own."

This bluster was political: Hazlitt was a Bonapartist liberal, and he was punishing Wordsworth, with any weapon which he thought would serve, for being a constitutionalist. But there was another Hazlitt—the literary critic; and *this* Hazlitt was for Wordsworth, not against him. The man who wrote what has just been quoted, wrote less than two years later, "Mr. Wordsworth is the most original poet now living. . . . Of many of the *Lyrical Ballads* it is not possible to speak in terms of too high praise . . . they are of inconceivable beauty, of perfect originality and pathos. They open a finer and deeper vein of thought and feeling than any poet in modern times has done or attempted." Jeffrey would now and then fling a morsel of praise at Wordsworth; but Hazlitt is here doing something

very different. This is sympathetic criticism; and, for its immediate purpose, it is adequate. Hazlitt's sympathy with Wordsworth was incomplete, but it was genuine. He knew the poet's weaknesses; but he knew also his strength and how mighty it was. He was not a philosopher; but he made what is, after all, the central discovery about Wordsworth, namely, that *he* was. He describes Wordsworth's higher egoism, his self-projection into things, with some hardness of tone, but with true insight. Of *Lyrical Ballads* he says, "Fools have laughed at, wise men scarcely understand, them. He takes a subject or a story as pegs or loops [*sic*] to hang thought and feeling on; the incidents are trifling, in proportion to his contempt for imposing appearances; the reflections are profound, according to the gravity and aspiring pretensions of his mind. . . . He has dwelt among pastoral scenes, till each object has become connected with a thousand feelings, a link in the chain of thought, a fibre of his own heart. . . . To the author of the *Lyrical Ballads,* nature is a kind of home; and he may be said to take a personal interest in the universe. There is no image so insignificant that it has not, in some mood or other, found the way into his heart. . . . He has described all these objects in a way, and with an intensity of feeling that no one else had done before him, and has given a new view or aspect of nature. . . . Remote from the passions and events of the great world, he has communicated interest and dignity to the primal movements of the heart of man, and ingrafted his own conscious reflections on the casual thoughts of hinds and shepherds. . . . The tall rock lifts its head in the erectness of his spirit; the cataract roars in the sound of his verse. . . . There is little mention of mountainous scenery in Mr. Wordsworth's poetry; but by internal evidence one might be almost sure that it was written in a mountainous country, from its bareness, its simplicity, its loftiness, and its depth." This, we feel, is the essential Wordsworth; this is Wordsworth almost as Matthew Arnold understood him.

Hazlitt, of course, wrote always as a contemporary critic, with no obligation to be reverent, and with an imperious obligation to be effective. He has said a great deal about *The Excursion,* with which, whether in its praise or its blame, little fault can be found. He is quite right, we feel, when he finds in

it a lack of constructive power proportionate to its pretensions and its length. He is quite right when he detects in it both flatness and insipidity. Yet we should feel debarred from saying of it, as he does, "The effect was like being ushered into a stately hall and invited to sit down to a splendid banquet in the company of clowns, and with nothing but successive courses of apple-dumplings served up." That is not the way to speak of a classic; and *The Excursion*, with all its faults, is a classic.

Thirdly, there is to be distinguished, alike from Jeffrey's scornful depreciation, and Hazlitt's somewhat patronizing approval, a body of cordially and intimately sympathetic criticism, which is centrally represented by Coleridge, and the later, soberer, "Christopher North." We have already found it in De Quincey, in Charles Lamb, and in Southey. In that *Quarterly* article which was so pulled about by Gifford, but which remains as an authentic and official counter-manifesto to Jeffrey, Charles Lamb came to close quarters with *The Excursion*. In spite of the editor's mauling, Wordsworth might well have been grateful for the appreciation. For Lamb writes reverently as well as approvingly; he has no scorn for *The Excursion;* makes no apology for it. Even *Despondency Corrected*, the Elizabethan Lamb—sometimes so non-moral as to have no word of disapproval for Wycherley—singles out as the best part of the poem. And when, at the close, he deals with Wordsworth's unpopularity, he accounts for it, not by any faults, but by his boldness and originality, and by the blindness of readers to those grandeurs and simplicities of the world which were revealed to the poet. "It [*The Excursion*] must indeed be approached with seriousness. . . . Those who hate the *Paradise Lost* will not love this poem. The steps of the great master are discernible in it; not in direct imitation or injurious parody, but in the following of the spirit, in free homage and generous subjection." Greater praise there could hardly be.

But the most systematic exposition of this kind of criticism was in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, published in 1817. This desultory book is one of the landmarks of romantic criticism. It reveals, in the light shed by an absolutely great critic, the inner workings of a literary movement in which he bore a chief part. The Wordsworthian criticism contained in it, however, has not all an equally absolute value. Part of it

is criticism, not of Wordsworth's poetry, but of his theories of poetry, imagination and fancy; and with those theories Coleridge had uncomfortable personal entanglements. He collaborated with Wordsworth in the original *Lyrical Ballads*, and then he edged out of the collaboration. The theory of poetry which *Lyrical Ballads* exemplified was excogitated by the two men on the Nether Stowey road and among the Quantocks; but when Wordsworth published the full exposition of the theory in later issues, Coleridge did not find himself altogether in agreement with it. Much of *Biographia Literaria* is occupied with dissent from Wordsworth's doctrines of imagination and poetic diction, and with a display of the inconsistencies between his theories and his practice. But at last the critic forgets controversy, and deals with the absolute value of Wordsworth's poetry as it was known in 1817.

Coleridge's criticism from this point of view is very far from being all praise. He complains of Wordsworth's egotism as a limitation. He finds many faults and defects in his poetry, and he begins by stating them. And when he comes to praise, he uses an ascending climax, in which the highest comes last. We must therefore begin at the end if we would know where Coleridge "places" Wordsworth. He places him, he estimates his absolute rank, in the following sentences: "Lastly, and pre-eminently, I challenge for this poet the gift of imagination in the highest and strictest sense of the word. . . . In imaginative power, he stands nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton; and yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own." This is enough; such an utterance from such a man, side by side with the judgments of Jeffrey and Hazlitt, makes the picture of early criticism all but complete. The rest, whether praise or dispraise, is, by comparison, detail. Yet it is important detail; and we may glance at it.

It is notable that Coleridge had the insight to praise highly Wordsworth's *style:* i.e., in particular, the careful appropriateness of his words, their "untranslatableness, in words of the same language without injury to the meaning." The value of this praise is heightened by Coleridge's consciousness of what he calls the "inconstancy" of Wordsworth's style, his frequent lapses in sentence or statement from the distinguished to the prosaic. There is no doubt that Wordsworth aimed at extreme

verbal conscientiousness and precision; and we must be grateful to Coleridge for hailing his success, and distinguishing it from those deficiencies in style which have bulked so large to many readers. And we must agree with him in finding in it, as he does, a moral as well as a literary element, an evidence of truthfulness as well as of artistic skill.

Coleridge urges also the freshness and originality of Wordsworth's thought; his truth to Nature; his deep pathos, born of human sympathy. The sympathy, he truly maintains, is that of a spectator rather than of a fellow-sufferer in the strict sense; but perhaps, as art, it is none the less wonderful for that. "In this mild and philosophic pathos," says Coleridge, "Wordsworth seems to me without a compeer. Such he *is;* so he *writes.*" On the other side of the shield, as Coleridge saw it, there were Wordsworth's "inconstancy" and its derivatives; his matter-of-factness, his prosaic detail, his frequent failure to produce imaginative fusion. Nor was Coleridge able to approve Wordsworth's addiction to rural forms of low life, though his reason for disapproval was different from those of the scornful critics. He was ready with some reservations to admit the essential dignity of the humblest human being, and the equality, in certain respects, of all men; but these were facts, he considered, for the moralist rather than the poet; the poet's primary aim is æsthetic; and it is somewhat morbid to derive poetic pleasure exclusively, or even chiefly, from the lowest rank of life, especially when, as in the case of the Wanderer in *The Excursion*, the sentiments attributed to a pedlar would have been more relevant to some more dignified personage.

Finally, Coleridge complained of an occasional want of the sense of proportion in Wordsworth; of an approach at times to "mental bombast," the use of "thoughts and images too great for the subject." It is the curse of those in whom the sense of humour, involving the sense of proportion, is feebly developed.

Not much later than *Biographia Literaria*, *Blackwood* took up the championship of Wordsworth with all the generous-hearted vigour of "Christopher North." Like Coleridge, and unlike both Jeffrey and Hazlitt, Wilson refused to adopt the "superior" attitude in criticizing. "For our own parts," he wrote, speaking for Maga, "we intend at all times to write of great living poets in the same spirit of love and reverence with

which it is natural to regard the dead and the sanctified ; and this is the only spirit in which a critic can write of his contemporaries without frequent dogmatism, presumption, and injustice." Wilson could make a sly jest at Wordsworth's expense, but only over the cheering cup of an ambrosial night ; in his serious hours he kept the enthusiasm of his youth, and was ready to maintain that Wordsworth was one of the great poets of his age, one of the greatest poets of any age. He recognized the philosophy and ethical elevation of his poetry ; the "love, benignity, and ethereal purity" which made him a unique interpreter of Nature. He considered him all but absolutely original in two respects : as a revealer of the more hidden and "silent" laws of the universe ; and as a revealer of the higher and more "beautiful," because gentler, phases of human nature. In both respects he seemed to Wilson other than characteristically English ; his philosophy, in its contemplative quietude, was "Indian" rather than British ; his studies in humanity were far away from the tastes which find poetry only in characters like Richard the Third, Milton's Satan, or the *Giaour*. Wilson cordially admitted Wordsworth's Miltonic rank ; and, in some respects, was disposed to put him above Milton. His sonnets, he thought, were finer than Milton's ; and "the openings into immutable brightness and harmony" which it was given to Wordsworth sometimes to reveal, were diviner than any sublimities of terror, tumult, or discord. There was, in short, an eternal value in Wordsworth's poetry which must ensure its immortality. It was "impossible, in the very nature of things, that he ever could be eclipsed."

Writing in the 'twenties, Wilson was able to recognize that the tide had turned ; that Wordsworth's influence was already great and was waxing. He found Wordsworth in Scott, Coleridge, Southey, Crabbe, even in Byron. "The two last cantos of Childe Harold . . . are in many places absolutely written, it may be said, by Wordsworth. He it was that taught Byron how to look on a mountain, and how to listen to a cataract or the sea." That may have been so ; but it was Byron's lasting vogue and the wide appeal of the sentimentalism borrowed from him by lesser versifiers, which was the chief bar to Wordsworth's popularity. Those who were leaving Byron behind did not turn to Wordsworth, but occupied themselves

with "L. E. L." and Mrs. Hemans until Tennyson was ready for them.

But great powers were on Wordsworth's side, and his hour had come. In the end of the 'twenties there was a great stir in the national life, and that stir helped Wordsworth. With the usual irony of things, the Liberalism which he so feared and hated helped to bring men to his feet. If the Romantic Revival was over, it was over only as summer is over when it passes into autumn. It was gathering in some of the many fruits of its harvest, and in that enrichment Wordsworth was made rich. Poetry like his, founded in revolution, permeated by philosophy, and maintaining, with serene inflexibility, the indefeasible dignity of essential human nature, could not be alien to an age of new ventures in thought and faith, an age eager to begin an assault on privilege. The newer Liberalism was too young to think of Wordsworth as a lost leader; in so far as Liberalism means thought as opposed to habit, there was much in Wordsworth to nourish Liberalism, and, on the other hand, the higher Conservatism which arose in opposition to Liberalism, the Conservatism which idealized the past, and found a voice in *The Christian Year* and the Oxford Tracts, might, if it would, claim Wordsworth's direct support.

It was in 1839 that Wordsworth's general fame was announced by the Oxford Doctorate; and it was in the course of the 'thirties that he was quietly winning the posts from which his forces never have been, and never will be, dislodged. He had a great ally in his old University. Byron was still powerful at Cambridge; but, among the younger and abler men there, there was a band of keen Wordsworthians who pitted their leader against Byron. The disciples of Coleridge, who were many at Cambridge, were, of course, readers and admirers of Wordsworth. What was practically a new cult was eagerly adopted by men like Monckton Milnes, John Sterling, and some others. Nothing could be more significant of Wordsworth's widening power than John Stuart Mill's testimony. Mill, though he had Cambridge friends, was not a Cambridge man. He was educated by his father, trained in utilitarian radicalism and agnosticism for utilitarian radicalism and agnosticism. In 1826 he passed through one of the crises to which thoughtful men are subject; his creed failed him, his power of hoping and

acting seemed to die. In 1828 he first read Wordsworth; and life, faith, and hope came back. Mill did not cease to be an agnostic and a utilitarian; but he became, through Wordsworth's agency, a new man. He was no Wordsworthian; he thought there were greater living poets than Wordsworth; nay, he thought him "the poet of unpoetical natures." But all the greater on this account was, he believed, his healing power. Mightier poets might soar too high, and dazzle instead of comfort. Wordsworth, by his contemplative tranquillity, taught the art of lasting happiness.

Mill remained a Benthamite after he came to admire Wordsworth. Frederick Maurice upheld Wordsworth against Utilitarianism at Cambridge; but he never whole-heartedly cared for him; he thought him too egoistic to be a great spiritual teacher. Henry Taylor's was a powerful voice for Wordsworth at this juncture. In 1834 and 1841 respectively, he wrote in the *Quarterly* essays on Wordsworth's poetry in general, and on his sonnets in particular. Taylor noted the strong turn of the tide in Wordsworth's favour during the ten years before 1834. He himself, though no blind partisan, had no hesitation in hailing Wordsworth as the greatest poet and philosopher of his age. Primarily he thought him a *poet:* he was a philosophic writer only "in the sense in which any man must be so who writes from the impulses of a capacious and powerful mind, habituated to observe, to analyze, and to generalize." His philosophy was his own; and could be understood only by those in sympathy with him as a poet. Taylor grasped the central fact that Wordsworth's subject was man; but man "never divested of his relations to external nature. Man is the text; but there is always a running commentary of external phenomena."

Wordsworth, Taylor thought, was sometimes artificial in his simplicity, and so gave the enemy occasion to blaspheme; and, in such poems as *The Idiot Boy*, he attempted an impossible amalgam of "the trivial and the grave, the imaginative and the familiar." Yet his habitual sincerity was one of the sources of his strongest power, and another was the accuracy of his knowledge founded on sympathy. Nor had he anything to be ashamed of in his style. Speaking of *Beggars*, Taylor dwells on "the consummate art with which it is constructed; the free vigour of the 'liquid lapse' of the verse; the care which is taken that there

shall be no prominences, nothing which shall *arrest* attention and exact admiration for parts to the injury of the rest."

For Wordsworth's intellectual powers in general, Taylor had the highest admiration; he would not have been misplaced in any situation; he was in possession of "a complete mind."

Yet in the fame which Wordsworth reaped in the last twenty years of his life, his power as a spiritual teacher was the chief factor. His most appreciative readers in his old age did not think of comparing him with Byron; they were not concerned either to condemn or defend the novelties with which he fluttered critical dovecots half a century before. Great seriousness, great conscientiousness was abroad; there was much individual heart-searching; great variety in social effort; much intensity of divergent religious thought. Wordsworth, standing outside all this, was to a large extent the poet of it. He was resorted to as a philosopher, a reconciler, able to grant Nature's own peace to tired effort and wounded hearts. The *Cœleste lumen* of which Keble spoke in his Creweian oration was the light of his poetry to the most discerning in those days. It was, as the same grateful reader wrote five years later, because Wordsworth, whatever was his theme, raised men's minds "to holier things" that he was loved and honoured.

Frederick Robertson of Brighton, a man of the keenest sensibilities, religious and literary, spoke words about Wordsworth in 1853 which are significant as to this phase of his reputation. He told an audience of working-men that for years he had tried to make Wordsworth's principles the guiding principles of his own inner life. He proceeded: "The general opinion about Wordsworth is exceedingly superficial. To the mass of the public all that is known of him is a conception something like this: They have heard of an old man who lived somewhere in the Lake District, who raved considerably of Lake scenery, who wrote a large number of small poems, all of them innocent, many of them puerile and much laughed at, at the time they appeared, by clever men; that they were lashed in the Reviews, and annihilated by Lord Byron."

Robertson's own high estimate of Wordsworth was very largely ethical. "The work he did, and I say it in all reverence, was the work which the Baptist did when he came to the pleasure-laden citizens of Jerusalem to work a reformation; it

was the work which Milton tried to do, when he raised that clear, calm voice of his to call back his countrymen to simpler manners and simpler laws."

Plainly, then, even at the date of his death, when he had been seven years Poet Laureate by universal acclamation, Wordsworth was not a popular poet. The echoes of the mocking laughter which greeted his early appearances had not quite died away. The mantle of mere popularity had passed from Byron, first to the minor sentimentalists, and then straight to Tennyson, who, during the whole of Wordsworth's laureateship, and in the years immediately following his death, interested the poetry-reading public much more keenly than Wordsworth did. Yet a thoughtful critic, now little heeded, who was too soon lost to English letters, George Brimley, the librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge, estimating Wordsworth in 1851, wrote thus: "William Wordsworth is generally allowed to have exercised a deeper and more permanent influence upon the literature and modes of thinking of our age, than any of the great poets who lived and wrote during the first quarter of the present century." And that influence, we may be sure, was mainly philosophical, mainly ethical, and it fell in an age which needed it.

> "He, too, upon a wintry clime
> Had fallen—on this iron time
> Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears.
> He found us when the age had bound
> Our souls in its benumbing round."

Every age, probably, thinks its round benumbing, but certainly doubt and fear are far from Wordsworth; and it must be a fatal numbness which does not disappear under his touch.

More than half a century has passed since Wordsworth died, and during that time criticism of the best kind has been doing its slow and steady work on his reputation. We may take note of some of that work, and estimate its general result.

In anticipation, we may perhaps say that the general result has been to define Wordsworth's greatness, and to merge his philosophical and ethical in his æsthetic and literary value. His greatness was assured before the close of his life; as to that criticism had decided with Coleridge and Wilson against Jeffrey and the scorners. But it remained to estimate and analyze it;

it remained, in particular, to show it as *poetic* greatness, and not as merely ethical and didactic profitableness. The "doubts, disputes, distractions, fears" of the mid-century tended to make Wordsworth seem mainly a teacher. If he is to stand as a great poet, he must be shown as an artist primarily giving "pleasure," and only secondarily as doing good.

Skilful and reverent hands have been at work on the task. Wordsworth, as Matthew Arnold said, "has brought luck to his critics"; they have praised him so well, and so worthily enhanced their critical reputation by his means. Perhaps the first of the band to deserve mention is John Campbell Shairp, the Scottish Professor of Poetry at Oxford between 1877 and 1887, a fine critic, and, in spirit and tendency, one of the most Wordsworthian of poets. Shairp, born in 1819, was old enough to remember vividly various ups and downs of Wordsworth's reputation; he could remember his rivalry with Byronism; his advance to the fulness of fame in which he died. He was acutely conscious also of a reaction which followed his death—a reaction which it would, perhaps, be more accurate to speak of as an eclipse. For in the 'fifties and 'sixties Tennyson loomed so large, and attracted so swiftly and so widely, that his predecessor in the laurel was inevitably obscured. Moreover, these were years when Browning was in his slow and remote ascendant, influencing selecter spirits whom Wordsworth might have satisfied. Such obscuration was really in Wordsworth's favour; he never has been, he never will be, popular as Tennyson and even Browning have been popular; and the preoccupation of poetry-readers with them has enabled him to take his place quietly among the classics. But to Shairp the neglect of Wordsworth seemed an evil sign, an indication of an "excitement-craving, unmeditative age."

Nothing, in any case, could have been better than the way in which the critic framed his *apologia.* He at once seized and kept the right point of view from which to estimate Wordsworth; he showed him, neither as an eccentric experimenter in poetic style, nor as an ethical teacher, but as a great imaginative poet, a revealer of that inner truth of things, which is their beautiful significance for poetry. Such a passage as the following showed what was a new insight into Wordsworth when it was written, an insight without which a true criticism of him cannot be

attempted. "There are many now in middle life, who look back to the time of their boyhood or early youth, when Wordsworth first found them, as a marked era in their existence. They can recall, it may be, the very place and the hour, when, as they read this or that poem of his, a new light, as from heaven, dawned suddenly within them. The scales of custom dropped from their eyes, and they beheld all nature with a splendour upon it, as of the world's first morning. The common sights and sounds of earth became other than they were. The heart leapt up to the white cirrhi clouds, and looked on the early stars of evening with a young wonder, not felt before. Man, too, and human life, cleared of the highway dust, came home to them more intimately, more engagingly, more solemnly, than before. For their hearts were touched by the poet's creative finger, and new springs of thought, tenderer wells of feeling, broke from beneath the surface. And though time and custom may have done much to dim the eye and choke the feelings which Wordsworth once unsealed, no time can ever efface the remembrance of that first unveiling, nor destroy the grateful conviction that to him they owe a delicate and inward service, such as no other poet has equally rendered."

In this "delicate and inward" utterance, put forth as a modest record of personal experience, Shairp inaugurated worthily the latest and best Wordsworthian criticism. For what he had found in Wordsworth was imagination, imagination of so high a quality and so original in its manifestation as to entitle him who exercised it to a place among great poets. Shairp was intensely religious, and exceedingly sensitive to the ethical sides of things; but he would have nothing to do with such a misreading of Wordsworth as would make him primarily a religious or ethical poet. For Shairp he was primarily a man of imagination, though he might not have so phrased it; a "vital soul." "The vital soul," he wrote, "it is a great gift, which, if ever it dwelt in man, dwelt in Wordsworth. Not the intellect merely, nor the heart, nor the imagination, nor the conscience, nor any of these alone, but all of them condensed into one, and moving all together. In virtue of this vital soul, whatever he did see he saw to the very core. He did not fumble with the outside or the accidents of the thing, but his eye went at once to the quick —rested on the essential life of it. He saw what was there, but

had escaped all other eyes. He did not import into the outward world transient fancies or feelings of his own, 'the pathetic fallacy,' as it has been named; but he saw it, as it exists in itself, or perhaps rather as it exists in its permanent moral relations to the human spirit." Could the action of imagination be better described or in more general terms? Here, indeed, is the common platform on which all the great artists stand. This is their power, their prerogative; here is at once their starting-point and their goal. Sir Leslie Stephen, early in the 'seventies, devoted one of his most thoughtful essays to Wordsworth. The title of the essay, "Wordsworth's Ethics," is significant of the critic's point of view, though it hardly defines the scope of the criticism. Stephen firmly grasps Wordsworth as a philosopher; and he admires him as a moral teacher. But his essay is mainly concerned to show the essential identity, or, at all events, the harmonious co-operation, of poetry and philosophy, in the explanation of the world and the guidance of conduct. Unlike Sir Henry Taylor, Stephen found, and rejoiced to find, a system of thought, or at least materials lending themselves to system, in Wordsworth. "Wordsworth's poetry," Stephen wrote, "speaks to our strongest feelings because his speculation rests upon our deepest thoughts. . . . His psychology, stated systematically, is rational; and, when expressed passionately, turns into poetry."

Matthew Arnold, who was Shairp's contemporary and friend, did much for Wordsworthian criticism, though not as much as he might have done. For, in spite of early personal association with Wordsworth, in spite of keen insight and considerable breadth of view, his temperament was antagonistic to Wordsworth's, and he did not understand or appreciate him as well as he thought he did. While he fully realized Wordsworth's greatness and his right to a very high place in England's poetic hierarchy, and while he realized that it was his poetry, and not his mere morality, that set him there, he spoiled his estimate by pooh-poohing his philosophy. He was led to do this emphatically by Leslie Stephen's criticism referred to above. He put Wordsworth's poetry and philosophy in antithesis to one another: *the poetry*, he said, *was reality, the philosophy illusion.* He took the popular view of Wordsworth's inequality; he held that the transcendent merit which he found in him belonged only to a fraction of his work, a fraction from which *The Prelude* and *The*

Excursion were excluded. But to treat Wordsworth's poetry thus is to subject it to an indignity, it is to mangle it into dishonour. Wordsworth is, indeed, strangely unequal; didacticism in him again and again breaks bounds; truth wearies instead of delighting with its beauty; inspiration rubs shoulders with what looks very like platitude. But, for all that, if Wordsworth's philosophy is illusion, his poetry is not worth much. If it is a disservice to him to reprint *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*, Jeffrey's estimate was not, after all, so wide of the mark. For, when all due admission has been made for Wordsworth's inequalities and lapses, his work remains a unity, and must be shown, must be accepted or rejected, as such. So much he claimed for it; so much must be granted him. If it is refused him, justice will not be satisfied by allowing to some of his poetry that it has an admirable "criticism of life," or "natural magic." If Shairp's words are not true: that "the vital soul . . . dwelt in Wordsworth; not the intellect merely, nor the heart, nor the imagination, nor the conscience, nor any of these alone, but all of them condensed into one, and moving all together;" and if the totality of Wordsworth's poetry is not the evidence of their truth, it is difficult to see how Wordsworth can ultimately stand near Shakespeare, Milton, and Shelley; how he can be a great poet.

Richard William Church, sometime Dean of St. Paul's, was an eminent critic of Wordsworth, who did not make Matthew Arnold's mistake. Belonging in the main to Keble's school of religious thought, Church felt no agnostic repulsion to Wordsworth's "sober certainties," to his sense of the reality of the Unseen, to his ever-recurring ethical emphasis, to the perfect terms on which he kept with religious ideas and phraseology. Whatever, therefore, he might say about Wordsworth, he was quite certain not to call his philosophy "illusion." On the contrary, he does not scruple to say, "Wordsworth was, first and foremost, a philosophical thinker." Nay, Dean Church came very near to praising him for didacticism. He fixed on a saying of Wordsworth's about himself, and gave it an interpretation of his own. "Every great poet," Wordsworth said once, "is a teacher; I wish either to be considered as a teacher or as nothing." Church conceives him to have meant not that he was in any sense unpoetic or unimaginative, but that he exercised

his poetic and imaginative powers under a sense of practical responsibility such as one cannot attribute to many other great poets on an equality with, or surpassing, him. But Dean Church never forgets that his work was poetry; and must be tried by the canons of poetry, *i.e.* primarily by intellectual and æsthetic canons. He finds in the first *Lyrical Ballads* alone "force and originality of thought, vividness and richness of imagination, command over the instrument of language, in its purity, its beauty, and its majesty." He freely accepts Wordsworth's own estimate of his innovations in poetry; he believes that the lowliness of his themes and diction was the result of imaginative insight, not of affected puerility. The "inflexible loyalty of truth" which he defines as "the prime condition of all his writings" was loyalty to truth which "could only be reached by thought and imagination." In this critic's estimate, Wordsworth's harvest of truth, gathered in by width and depth of imagination, supplemented the gifts of Shakespeare and Milton, and was contributed to by such writers as Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot. Nor, with such an estimate, does Dean Church's sympathy with Wordsworth's high morality blind him to his literary limitations and defects. He finds in him an egotism which lowers him; a narrowness which neutralizes, hinders his insight; a pompousness which spoils his style. And he finally identifies himself with Coleridge's reverent and undazzled appraisement.

Mr. Stopford Brooke, who has done so much towards the better understanding of English poetry, has done much towards the better understanding of Wordsworth. More, perhaps, than any other critic, he has realized what in him may be called *mystical*, its reality and its importance. The quasi-personality which Wordsworth found in Nature, the unity of thought which he attributed to it, Mr. Stopford Brooke takes seriously, and shows as the poet's central discovery. He points out that his view of Nature as pervaded by one living soul, though it has affinities with the view of some Italian Neo-Platonists of the Renaissance, was quite new in English poetry. He was "the first who loved Nature with a personal love."

The remainder of the criticism which deserves notice is significant. For it proceeds from men who, from one cause or another, are detached from moral prejudice and religious

prepossession ; many of whom are not ill disposed to toy with the notion of "art for art's sake," and all of whom are well aware that verse is not made poetry by being enlisted on the side of religion and virtue.

Mr. Swinburne has praised Wordsworth highly at the expense of Byron, and criticized him chiefly in opposition to Matthew Arnold, so his estimate is too heavily seasoned with controversy to live as a great appreciation. Yet the genuine homage, which he makes no attempt to disguise or restrain, paid by him to a poet in all respects so heterogeneous as Wordsworth, is an important sign of the times.

The late Mr. Frederick Myers gave us, in his monograph on the poet, an excellent study of Wordsworth, based on the approving acceptance, in his main, of his philosophy of Nature, his general conception of poetry, and his imaginative treatment of humanity. As regards the last point, Myers reached a generalization in advance, perhaps, of anything hitherto asserted in Wordsworth's praise. "We may almost venture . . . to assert that no writer since Shakespeare has left us so true a picture of the British nation." One wonders what Jeffrey, Hazlitt, or, for that matter, Coleridge, would have said to such a *dictum*.

Almost simultaneously with Myers, Sir John Seeley, in his *Natural Religion*, linked Wordsworth with Goethe—superficially his acute literary antagonist—as one of the two great poets who expounded and exhibited the ideal natural religion, the devotion and worship which may be paid to the Universe, conceived as a unity or system of inter-relations.

Mr. John Morley's admiration is less loftily pitched. His estimate involves something of a return to the ethical respect and gratitude of the mid-nineteenth century. Wordsworth's primary claim on this critic's attention is, one can plainly see, his *teaching;* the process of ethical simplification and purification—what was best in Rousseau with none of what was bad—which was wrought by the austere revolutionary-conservative enthusiast of Grasmere and Rydal. When he comes to a purely literary estimate, he falls back on the time-honoured antithesis between Wordsworth inspired and Wordsworth uninspired, and is disposed to place him as mere poet, not only much below the greatest classics, but considerably below some of his great contemporaries. Yet it is significant that he does

not ultimately yield to the temptation. His last word is that Wordsworth probably will stand below Shakespeare, Milton, and Dante, but that he cannot be sure. After all literary deductions have been conscientiously made, what remains seems so great that the critic must account for it. He does so by fixing once more on the ethical in Wordsworth, on his "direct appeal to will and conduct" as that which places him "on a line just short of the greatest of all time." This moral appeal, Mr. Morley holds, is made *poetically;* it is no system in verse; it stands or falls with no religious or metaphorical prepossession; it reaches us, often through a fanciful, sometimes through a false, medium. All the same, it is the appeal of sincerity; it proceeds from truthfulness, from one who saw and knew things—many things, at least—with his own eyes and to the bottom. So he was able to "bring the infinite into common life," and, by doing so, "to assuage, to reconcile, to fortify."

From our point of view, the most important contribution to Wordsworthian criticism is the latest, the careful study of Professor Walter Raleigh. For here at last we get as complete detachment as we can hope for; here is no party-manifesto; no halting between ethical approval and literary fault-finding; this is the first genuine twentieth-century reaction to Wordsworth's influence. The wheel has come full circle; and Wordsworth is avenged of all his adversaries.

Professor Raleigh is no "Wordsworthian"; he is as conscious of Wordsworth's shortcomings as of his successes; but he knows that, taken for all in all, and as he is, he is a great poet, whom it is the business of true criticism to expound on the assumption of his originality, not to judge according to Aristotelian or other canons. "Criticism," he tells us, "must . . . follow the poet, if he gives any token of being worth the following, step by step, recreating his experiences, hanging on his words, disciplining itself to the measure of his paces, believing in him and living with him." And Professor Raleigh ties himself to his own rescript; he enters into Wordsworth with reverence and sympathy, not so much either praising or blaming him, as showing his method and analyzing his results. He takes him quite seriously throughout, in his dealings with Nature and in his dealings with Man, believing in the genuineness, the reality, of what Wordsworth found in them. So

strongly, indeed, does Professor Raleigh believe in the reality of those Wordsworthian assertions which many readers have shaken their heads over as "mystic," and which even Mr. Morley smiles at as mere play of fancy, that it is perhaps his greatest discovery that Wordsworth wrote in a "spirit of science." There is a great deal to make the superficial student of Wordsworth think otherwise; he seems to have a quarrel with science, to regard it as "murdering to dissect," as seeing things "in disconnection dull and spiritless." But Professor Raleigh is impressed by Wordsworth's famous saying that "Poetry is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science"; and he concerns himself to show that the truth of the saying can be proved out of Wordsworth's own work. Wordsworth's whole-hearted delight in Nature, the sober cheerfulness of his hopes for the race, the profound awe with which he came back from his visits to the "mind of Man," were quite untainted with that distaste for reality which both religion and art have often felt; Wordsworth faced reality fully with no impulse either to flee or to falsify; and this, Professor Raleigh reminds us, is the characteristic attitude of science. Poetry smiles in the eyes of science; beauty is begotten of truth.

Wordsworth, in Professor Raleigh's estimate, was, before all things, a *seer:* in his vision itself, and its inherent power, not in any morals drawn from it by the poet, lies the moral force which it is impossible not to feel in Wordsworth. It is thus that Wordsworth is a teacher without being, in his best work, didactic; that he is philosophic without forfeiting poetry. And he is not only a seer, but an adventurous explorer; his imagination often led him into places beyond which there is no foothold. It is in such situations that he comes nearest to failure. He pressed onward to a point where speech fails and drops into silence, where thought is baffled and turns back upon its own footsteps. When we read him aright, we accompany him on his great expeditions; and are braced by sharing his honourable retreats. "To know him is to learn courage; to walk with him is to feel the visitings of a larger, purer air, and the peace of an unfathomable sky."

And so, at the end of our consorting with Wordsworth, seeing him among his friends and fellow-workers, trying to

realize him in his habit as he lived, and to read the features of his genius, not only in his own writings, but in those answering minds which have felt him most acutely, we bear away, it may be hoped, a true image. We see him set free, after long bondage, from the shackles of comparison, and the pitiful tyranny of mockers and scorners. It does not interest us to assert or deny his inferiority to other poets, any more than it would to assert or deny the inferiority of the beauty of spring to the beauty of autumn, of the pageantry of dawn to the pageantry of sunset. Why should we insult the great brotherhood of song by vulgar reasonings as to which shall be greatest? Enough for us that in that brotherhood Wordsworth has an undisputed place. Let us compare him—and the more the better—with Shakespeare, Milton, Gray, Burns, Shelley, or whom we will, that we may, if possible, determine what is his special contribution to the riches of the human spirit. But let us not misread the lesson of his unconquerable solitariness, his serene egoism, his austere isolation. They were the result neither of his greatness nor of his littleness, but of his individuality. It fell to him to do—imperfectly, it may be, and at times almost repellently—a peculiar work for poetry, to exercise a daring contemplative and penetrative imagination in an age of many revolutions, with the modern spirit developing at great proportionate speed. It was work which could be done only in a beautiful and remote place, sparsely peopled with simple folk. The literary excitements of London, the stimulation of foreign scenery and races, the convivialities and sensualities from the midst of which some other poets have somehow learned to deliver their message, would have made Wordsworth's message impossible. He had many friends, and was always glad to see them; but his teachers and intimate companions could be none other than the stars and the hills and the waters, and those human beings, at once common and rare, who seemed to share their elemental life.

It is Wordsworth's great triumph that he has at last persuaded us to take him substantially at his own estimate, and precisely as he was. Early critics thought him much of an impostor; whatever we may think of him, we shall never again think that. The world which we find in his poetry may not be the whole world, but it is the real world; revealed to imagination and reproduced by art such as only great poets possess.

And Wordsworth's narrowness, his petulant and ungracious exclusions, do not, we now see, avail to hinder his ever active sense of the Universal. The simple people and homely scenes with which his verse concerns itself are chosen not for their simplicity and homeliness, but for the transcendent majesty and awful beauty, the melting pathos or terrifying tragedy, which his imagination found in them, and of which his poetry convinces us. Wordsworth knew the world differently from Shakespeare; but it was the same world, and he knew it, in one sense, as well. And the depths discovered by both poets are equally unfathomable. Therefore, it is, we are sure that Wordsworth is immortal. Men will find something fresh in him, something vitally relevant, in all ages.

We do not vex ourselves so much with that lack of unity, of homogeneity in Wordsworth's poetry which used to be such a stumbling-block. Whether by sifting, or by increased tolerance, we have enough to provide us with unity of impression and estimate. Wordsworth is not only great; he is also one. The image no longer seems of mingled gold and clay. There is clay, no doubt; but it does not deform as it used to do, and it does not trouble us.

Nor do we now fall on Wordsworth, as our fathers did, for sacrificing beauty to truth, beauty that delights, to truth that edifies. If he could be proved guilty of this charge, his claim to be a great poet could not be sustained. Even poets like Dryden and Pope do not live as poets by the common sense which was their truth, but by the metrical skill and wit which were their substitutes for beauty. Wordsworth had no such substitutes to fall back upon; nor did he need them. He reached and rendered the beautiful. His was the quest on which all great poets are more or less consciously bound, the quest for the unity of the Beautiful and the True; and we are sure now that he did not return baffled. We know that he had a fresh and original vision, and we can share it. He saw very deep into the life of things, and in its depth is its beauty. Hence his serenity, his optimism, his cheerful faith. His genius had a transfiguring touch, not, as we used to think, a dulling one. He used the artist's loftiest power when he chose the weak things of the world to confound the things that were mighty, when he showed what less enlightened eyesight had

taken for a wilderness to be blossoming as the rose. Nature and Man; the poet has essentially no other theme. Yet each poet has his own message about them, his own chosen point of view from which he regards them. Wordsworth's point of view was that of the artist who is also a philosopher and a prophet, in some sense a priest. Rightly understood, he can never seem alien, either from the religious, or from those who stop short of religion. The themes of his verse, the sights and sounds, the things and the persons and thoughts that engage him, are grounded on the most positive and reasonable reality. And yet we see on them the stamp which men set on the foreheads of angels; and the service for which he marshals them is Divine.

APPENDIX

REFERENCES

of some of the principal passages quoted in the text—

Page 11. *Many were the thoughts*, etc. *Prelude*, Bk. i., 70–74.
„ 18. *To place himself*, etc. *Guide to the Lakes* (Frowde, 1906), 22–24.
„ 20. *Many are the notes*, etc. *Excursion*, Bk. ii., 696–723.
„ 21. *A step*, etc. Ib. ii., 829–876.
„ 25. *Thou look'st upon me*, etc. *Address from the Spirit of Cockermouth Castle.* Sonnet of 1833.
„ 28. *The sighs which Matthew*, etc. *Matthew.*
„ 28. *The eye—it cannot*, etc. *The Tables Turned.*
„ 31. *There was a Boy*, etc. The poem is so called. Also *Prelude*, v., 364.
„ 32. *While on the perilous*, etc. *Prelude*, i. 336–339.
„ 32. *Far above*, etc. Ib. i., 371, 372.
„ 33. *Wisdom and Spirit*, etc. Ib. i., 401–414. Also as separate poem called "Influence of Natural Objects in Calling forth and Strengthening the Imagination in Boyhood and Early Youth."
„ 33. *Oft amid*, etc. Ib. i., 581–588.
„ 35. *Those hallowed*, etc. Ib. i., 551–558.
„ 35. *For the discerning*, etc. From *The Recluse.*
„ 36. *Gentle agitations*, etc. Ib. *Prelude*, 298–301.
„ 36. *An auxiliar light*, etc. Ib. ii., 368–376.
„ 36. *The snow-white church*, etc. Ib. iv., 21, 22.
„ 37. *When first I made*, etc. Ib. iv., 137–152.
„ 37. *'Mid a throng*, etc. Ib. iv., 309–319.
„ 38. *To the brim*, etc. 333–337.
„ 45. *I cannot paint*, etc. *Lines Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey.*

Page 46. *March firmly*, etc. *Prelude*, x., 511–589.
„ 50. *I saw her*, etc. "*She was a phantom of delight.*"
„ 51. *She whispered still*, etc. *Prelude*, xi., 345–347.
„ 51. *But for thee*, etc. Ib. xiv., 247–256.
„ 53. *For the Man who*, etc. *Excursion*, iv., 1208–1229.
„ 53. *The Being*, etc. Ib. iv., 1264–1274.
„ 65. *I heard*, etc. *Lines written in Early Spring.*
„ 66. *Nay, traveller, rest!* etc. *Lines left upon a seat in a yew-tree.*
„ 73. *Thus fear relaxed*, etc. *Prelude*, xiv., 282–301.
„ 73. *That summer*, etc. Ib. xiv., 395–413.
„ 82. *I mourned with thousands*, etc. *At the Grave of Burns*, 1803.
„ 120. *A plague*, etc. *Written in Germany.*
„ 121. *I kissed his cheek*, etc. *Address to the Scholars of the Village School of* ——.
„ 124. *O there is blessing*, etc. *Prelude*, i. 1–3.
„ 124. *To the open fields*, etc. Ib. i. 50–54.
„ 126. *A narrow girdle*, etc. *Poems on the Naming of Places.* No. 4.
„ 127. *As beautiful to thought*, etc. *The Recluse.*
„ 128. *On Nature's invitation*, etc. Ib.
„ 132. *On me*, etc. *The Sparrow's Nest.*
„ 132. *While I am lying*, etc. *To the Cuckoo.*
„ 133. *Would'st thou be happy*, etc. *The Redbreast chasing the Butterfly.*
„ 134. *Sent forth such sallies*, etc. *Poems on the Naming of Places.* No. 1.
„ 134. *The Eminence*, etc. Ib. No. 3.
„ 135. *A cloistral place*, etc. *Poems on the Naming of Places.* No. 6.
„ 142. *Never sun on living creature*, etc. *Stanzas written in my Pocket Copy of Thomson's Castle of Indolence.*
„ 148. *In the choir*, etc. Coleridge: *To a Gentleman;* beginning, "Friend of the Wise! and Teacher of the Good!"
„ 149. *Of thee*, etc. *Prelude*, xiv., 276, etc.
„ 150. *To fill*, etc. *The Recluse.*
„ 153. *He had felt*, etc. *Excursion*, i., 191–218.
„ 155. "*Ah! why*," etc. Ib. ix., 36–47.
„ 159. *In the shady grove*, etc. *Poems on the Naming of Places.* No. 6.
„ 163. *Here did we stop*, etc. *Elegiac Verses in Memory of my brother, John Wordsworth.*
„ 171. *She came, no more*, etc. *Prelude*, xiv., 268–274.
„ 172. '*Tis a fruitless task*, etc. *To a Painter;* beginning, "All praise the likeness by thy skill portrayed."
„ 173. *O, my Beloved*, etc. *On the Same Subject.*

Page 238. *He wrote three poems.* The second of the three, from which the verses on p. 239 are quoted, was written many years after the visit to Dumfries, though *felt*, Wordsworth tells us, at the time.

„ 268. *I have felt*, etc. *Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey.*

„ 269. *How exquisitely*, etc. *The Recluse.*

„ 277. *Great God!* etc. Sonnet beginning, "The world is too much with us."

„ 298. *The Antechapel*, etc. *Prelude*, iii., 60–63.

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